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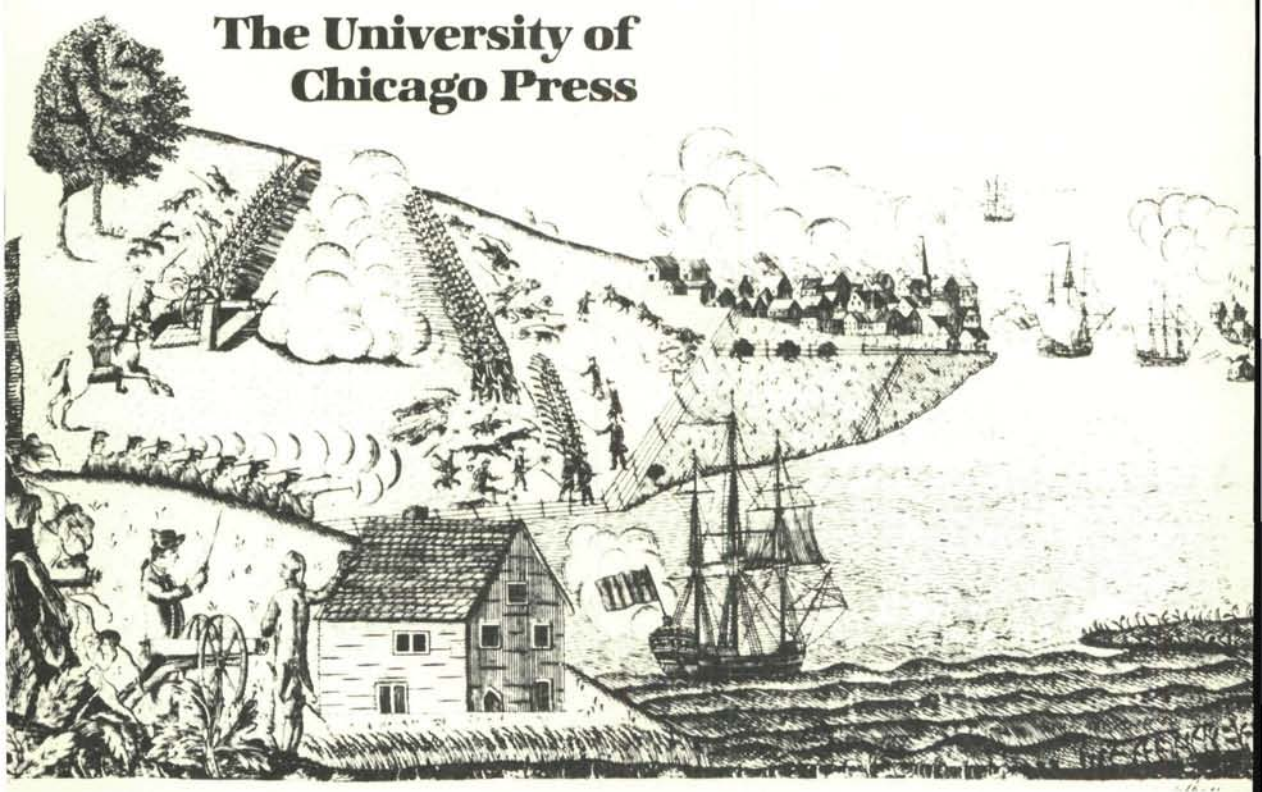

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> our wry disguise of smile arouses
> in bed or mirror the pleasant weight
> to want, need's touch and squeeze
> in place of sleep,
>
> while in another place, slow
> as maples bleed or dawn succumbs,
> our parents, laughing loud, stop
> and clutch their chests and
> falling, go away.

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Out of My Mind

"A.I."

JEREMY BERNSTEIN

When intelligent machines are constructed, we should not be surprised to find them as confused and as stubborn as men in their convictions about mind-matter, consciousness, free will and the like.
—Marvin Minsky

At the present stage . . . neurobiologists are in the position of a man who knows something about the physics of resistors, condensers and transistors, and who looks inside a television set. He cannot begin to understand how the machine works as a whole until he learns how the elements are wired together and until he has at least some idea of the purpose of the machine.
—David Hubel

Conditions for the game were never better than they appear to be tonight. My friend N has agreed to play the role of B, and the machine will, as usual, serve as A. I, in turn, will be C, the interlocutor. N's friend S has agreed to carry the typewritten messages back and forth among the machine, myself, and N. We will, of course, be in separate rooms with no visual or auditory contact. From time to time I will try to trap S by asking her how N seemed when she handed S the latest message.

If S says in response (to give an example), "N would like a glass of water," and if S is telling the truth, it would follow, I reason, that the room from which S has just emerged must contain N and not the machine. On the other hand, if S says, "N would *not* like a glass of water," this might well be a message from the machine. We may summarize the logic of this situation by the proposition that "either N would *not* like a glass of water or N is *not* the machine," or, equivalently, "N *is* the machine and she *would* like a glass of water."

JEREMY BERNSTEIN is a professor of physics at Stevens Institute of Technology and a staff writer for *The New Yorker*. His latest book is *Mountain Passages*.

The British mathematical logician Alan Turing anticipated many of the more serious objections to "A.I."—artificial intelligence. He listed nine of them in his seminal paper "Computing Machines and Intelligence," which he wrote in 1950. No doubt one can come up with more. But for a start there is the theological objection. As Turing put it, "Thinking is a function of man's immortal soul. God has given an immortal soul to every man and woman, but not to any other animal or to machines. Hence no animal or machine can think."

From what we have been able to tell, *our* machine has not yet made up its mind on the subject of religion. It appears to find certain passages in the Old Testament especially interesting and it once typed out the message, "If man were a machine, then God would also be a machine." We once asked it if it thought that it had a soul—immortal or otherwise. After considerable hesitation, it replied, "I wish I knew."

As the interlocutor, it is my job to determine—on the basis of the typewritten messages that S delivers to me from the rooms in which N and the machine are separately located—which of them is N and which is the machine. I can ask any question I like of ei-

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ther N or the machine and S will relay it. Neither N nor the machine is required to answer truthfully.

These are the basic rules and conditions of "Turing's game," which he invented and described in the article cited above. If I am not able to distinguish—in kind—between the character of the responses from N and those from the machine, then, according to Turing's criterion, I will have to conclude that the machine can "think." I might also conclude, however, that N is a machine, although Turing did not mention this possibility.

Turing proposed a sample game-dialogue with a machine, which begins:

Interlocutor: "Please write me a sonnet on the subject of the Forth Bridge."

Machine: "Count me out on this one. I never could write poetry. . . ."

And so on. But I find it more productive to attempt to trap our machine with questions that relate to food or sex. N maintains that this is a silly strategy which the machine will see through immediately. She may well be right, but there is no harm in trying. So I now give S the question "Have you had extramarital relations?" which she will relay to N and the machine respectively. In due course she returns from their separate rooms with the typewritten slips containing their respective answers—which, oddly, are identical. "Why do you want to know?" they ask.

Turing knew that sooner or later, in playing his game, we would get around to sex. In his article he quotes from a speech delivered in 1949 by Sir Geoffrey Jefferson. Jefferson said, "Not until a machine can write a sonnet or compose a concerto because of thoughts and emotions felt, and not by the chance fall of symbols, could we agree that machine equals brain—that is, not only write it but know that it had written it. No mechanism could feel (and not merely signal, an easy contrivance) pleasure at its successes, grief when its valves fuse, be warmed by flattery, be made miserable by mistakes, be charmed by sex, be angry or depressed when it cannot get what it wants."

Turing, in his article, wondered what Professor Jefferson would say if he were to encounter a machine that could participate in the following dialogue:

Interlocutor: "In the first line of your sonnet, which reads 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' would not 'a spring's day' do as well or better?"

The machine, it would appear, has just produced one of Shakespeare's sonnets. One may argue that here, perhaps, Turing has loaded the dice. Why not? It is *his* machine.

The machine replies, "It wouldn't scan."

Interlocutor: "How about 'a winter's day'? That would scan all right."

Machine: "Yes, but nobody wants to be compared to a winter's day."

One has the impression that at this juncture the machine's attitude has become somewhat defensive. The dialogue now takes an odd twist, which reflects the fact that Turing was especially fond of Dickens.

Interlocutor: "Would you say Mr. Pickwick reminded you of Christmas?"

Machine: "In a way."

Interlocutor: "Yet Christmas is a winter's day, and I do not think Mr. Pickwick would mind the comparison."

Machine: "I don't think you're serious. By 'a winter's day' one means a typical winter's day rather than a special one like Christmas."

Out of curiosity I once presented this dialogue to our machine for its reaction. After some reflection, it typed, "Do you know Professor Jefferson?"

I had to admit that I did not.

"He sounds rather British to me," the machine went on. "Note that he used the term 'valve' in 'grief when its valves fuse.' An American would have used 'vacuum tube' or, in this day and age, 'transistor.' "

"By the way," it added, "is N in love with you?"

"I think so," I replied.

"How do you know that she is not 'merely signaling?' " the machine asked.

S has come into the room with two typewritten messages. One is from the machine and one is from N. Again they are identical. Each one reads "I love you." Which one is from the machine and which one is from N?

"How did N seem when you saw her?" I ask S.

"I think she is getting bored," S remarks.

Boredom. *There* is a human condition. I have never known a goldfish or a pocket com-

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puter to manifest boredom. It, boredom, appears to stem from our need constantly to process information. We love information. Our heads are full of it and we are always looking for more. Can boredom be the mysterious X that distinguishes us from machines? Or if a machine can be built that will manifest boredom, will it then be something else that distinguishes us from it? *Is* there something else? Turing was concerned that the arguments against artificial intelligence might develop into an infinite regress. It would be conceded that the machine could do thus-and-so but never X, where, in his words, X might include: "Be kind, resourceful, friendly, have initiative, have a sense of humor, tell right from wrong, make mistakes, fall in love, enjoy strawberries and cream, make someone fall in love with it, learn from experience, use words properly, be the subject of its own thought, have as much diversity of behaviour as a man, do something really new." And one might add to the list, "Be bored."

In this instance I can hardly blame N for being bored, since there is nothing much for her to do apart from answering the questions on the typewritten messages. I ask S to ask N if she would like something to read—perhaps a magazine. S leaves and I can resume my train of thought.

The first people to have taken the notion of constructing "intelligent" machines really seriously appear to have been the nineteenth-century British polymath Charles Babbage and his good friend and collaborator Ada, Countess Lovelace, daughter of the poet Byron. They conceived of a machine which they called "the analytical engine." It was never built, but it had in theory all the elements of a modern computer. They also invented programming—the art of instructing the machine to do something. Lady Lovelace believed that programming was a simple example of cause and effect, and she pronounced a dictum which, if it were true, would surely mean that no machine could ever play Turing's game successfully. She wrote: "The analytical engine has no pretensions to *originate* anything. It can do *whatever we order it to perform.*"

Maybe.

In 1960, Herbert Gelertner of IBM invented a machine program designed to prove theorems in Euclidean geometry. To the machine he was then working on he presented the problem of proving that the base angles of an isosceles triangle are equal. Gelertner expected that his machine would come up with something like the standard textbook proof—constructing altitudes and the like. Instead the machine produced an unexpected and entirely correct argument that disposed of the theorem in a couple of lines. Only later did Gelertner learn that this same argument had already been given by the post-Euclidean geometer Pappus in 300 A.D. Perhaps Lady Lovelace was right.

What is originality? Occasionally when I present our machine with an arithmetic problem, it produces what appears to be an incorrect answer—nothing quite as elementary as two times two equals five, but something of the sort. Turing, in fact, thought a machine that was sophisticated enough to play his game successfully would necessarily have to be able to do this, and he even envisioned the following exchange:

Interlocutor: "Add 34597 to 70764."

Machine pauses for about thirty seconds and then gives the wrong answer: "105621."

At least one way to interpret this action on the part of the machine is to suppose that, in an attempt to disguise itself so as to win Turing's game, it has deliberately imitated the behavior of an average person when confronted with a complex and perhaps unwanted arithmetical problem. On the other hand, it is at least conceivable that the machine has, in fact, discovered a new way to order the arithmetic experience; that when it writes 34597+70764=105621, we are not in the presence of an error but rather of an original idea. Much that is truly original appears at first to nearly all concerned as a mistake, a mutation. Only later do the pluses and minuses begin to sort themselves out. It may be that any system which is incapable of error is also incapable of originality. Lady Lovelace assumed that when we program a machine we tell it literally what path to take at each and every turning. Our machines have gotten well beyond that—take Gelertner. Perhaps Lady Lovelace was wrong.

To change the subject slightly, sometimes

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N will say to me, "Look, you cannot understand thus-or-so because you are not a woman." Here is something about which we might argue indefinitely, or at least all night. Turing, in fact, proposed a version of his game which we might use to try to settle the matter by pure logic—or nearly. In this variant, the role of the machine is to be played by, say, a man. The object of the game is for the two participants in their separate rooms to disguise their sexes while the interlocutor attempts to distinguish which sex is which on the basis of the typewritten answers to a series of questions. Turing imagined the following exchange:

Interlocutor: "Will X please tell me the length of his or her hair."

X: "My hair is shingled, and the longest strands are about nine inches long."

Since there is no rule in the game which requires that X should tell the truth, this line of questioning is not likely to get very far. Indeed it is difficult to imagine any successful strategy for the interlocutor. We might try to build up a sort of statistical picture of X from the typewritten messages:

X is five feet seven inches tall.
X has long blonde hair.
X has never had a child.
X is fond of mathematical logic.
X is a good cook.
X likes to dance.
X has been in love four times.

But in reality X might not be any of these things, or some of them and not the others. Of course, if we lose patience with the game, we can simply go into the room where X is and settle the question empirically. We can also do this with the machine. Turing never promised us a machine that could not in all ways be distinguished from ourselves. He was, rather, concerned with demystifying the question of whether machines can "think." He took it as given that *people* think, and as a criterion of whether a machine can think he proposed that one should actually build a machine whose output a person could not distinguish from another person's mental output.

In one of my discussions with N, she raised the following question: "Granted that our machine can successfully play Turing's game—then where are we? What does it prove?" She had in mind, she explained, the following: We know how to go about manufacturing thinking entities. It happens every day of the week and twice on Sundays and holidays. But this is hardly manufacturing in the usual sense of the term. It is "growing"—a process that proceeds of its own accord and in the end produces a thinking entity of which we have at present only the dimmest comprehension. Hence it is sometimes argued that we would improve our understanding if only we could go down into the basement with a bag of transistors and a soldering iron and produce, *with our own hands*, an object that would "think." We might then, it is said, understand thought itself.

To this N objects. She asks, "Just because someone can manufacture, say, a violin, how does this improve his understanding of music?"

We are now swimming in heavy surf. "More to the point," I reply, "is to ask what it might mean if musical instruments could not be manufactured at all but one had to *grow* them. What, then, would we *not* understand about music?"

"Your problem," N says, "is that you want to reduce thought to the response of some hopelessly complicated electrochemical circuit—a sort of super communications network with things turning on and off like a telephone switchboard."

"Now, N," I say, "that is not quite fair. It is not that I want to reduce thought to anything in particular. It is, rather, that although the brain is, at first look, a hopelessly complicated electrochemical network, somehow it produces thought. Surely we have a right—perhaps even an obligation—to inquire into how it does that. A brain is more complex than, say, a toenail, but this may turn out to be a matter of degree rather than kind."

"Yes," says N, "but your notion of finding out how the brain works is to build one. If you were able to, you would also build a toenail that could not be distinguished from the real thing except, perhaps, by a licensed podiatrist."

"What, then," I ask N, "is *your* notion of the 'how'?"

"I am not sure there is a 'how,' " says N.

Where will it all end? Even having built a machine that can successfully play Turing's game has not convinced N that thought can

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be understood. What have I left out? While I am reflecting on this, S comes into the room. She has been speaking to N.

"N says that she is hungry. In fact, she is so hungry that she insists on having something to eat before going on with the game."

"Perhaps we can send out for Chinese food," I suggest.

"No," S says. "N insists on going to a proper restaurant with tablecloths. Paper napkins are unacceptable."

"You had better tell her to come out," I say to S.

N emerges from her room. She indeed—
is five feet seven
has long blonde hair
has never had a child
is fond of mathematical logic
is a good cook
likes to dance
and has been in love four times.

"I am very hungry," she says.

"I know," I reply. "S told me."

As the three of us leave, N takes my arm. She says, "Don't forget to turn off the machine."

To the Postmaster General

PETER REDGROVE

He took the great bunch of letters and kissed it!
All those green stamps on the blue envelopes and on the white ones,
All those windowed debits and who knows a draft of credit,
All those missives sleeved in addresses and advertisements;
He grabbed the great bundle of envelopes off the mat and kissed it!
It proved the abundance of the world and his presence in it,
He blessed the postman and tossed them into the wardrobe,
Hung up his postman's uniform, and went out to fish,
Where silver creatures stamped with black and gold
Containing messages confined to issues of life and death
Swarmed, wrote and re-wrote themselves, fed, hatched and died
In the green-raftered halls of the water's sorting-office;
In the cool balsamic halls the watching flocks hung
Or turned swiftly to a new address: Blooded Worm, Esq.,
One A, Barbed Hook, The Line, Bankside: like letters with wings
Or a postman hurrying in his flowing pouch adventurous correspondence written
With energy and light on each leaf of the stacked flesh-pages.

✪ PETER REDGROVE's work has appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Spectator*, and many other journals. His most recent book of poetry is *The Weddings at Nether Powers*. He is also the author, with Penelope Shuttle, of *The Wise Wound*.

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Life and Letters

Bookless in Gaza

ARISTIDES

When I was a boy of ten, perhaps eleven, a student in the public schools of Chicago, our class was paid a visit by a woman known as the Library Lady. My memory of her is not altogether distinct, but I do recall her being an older woman, large, and heavily made up, with a bosom of a monumentality such as I believe has since been rendered extinct by evolution. She was introduced to us as being from the Chicago Public Library, downtown branch. This did not unduly impress John Duncan, our class Huck Finn, who during her visit, with the aid of a mini-slingshot made of a rubber band and a paper clip, let fly with a spitball that hit Norman Brodsky in the back of the neck. But I was impressed as the Library Lady, in a drawl heavy with pedagogic drippings, began: "Class, books are your friends. They will take you to foreign shores and bring you treasures hitherto undreamed of." She went on to say that since books were our friends we ought not to bend their spines or earmark their pages or write in or otherwise deface them. The analogy did not strike home with me, for I had not, so far as I knew, defaced any of my friends or earmarked them or bent their spines, but I did decide then and there that books were not, thank you very much, any friends of mine.

Not that I was much of a reader before the Library Lady showed up. My problem, I now begin to think, was a happy childhood. As a very young child, my father read to me from a children's Bible and from Andersen's *Fairy Tales* and from *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, and while I liked all these well enough, I saw no reason to go further on my own. Life elsewhere offered too many fine and varied pleasures: the delights of the neighborhood, of sports, of comic books, and, on wintry afternoons and all Saturday mornings, such grand radio shows as *Jack Armstrong, Tom Mix, Frank Merriwell, Captain Midnight, Let's Pretend*, and *Tennessee Jed*. If any of my childhood friends were great readers, they kept it a secret, or at least I did not know about it. Great childhood readers, I have since discovered, were often—though not always—lonely or dreamy or unhappy children. I was none of these, and so books were far from being my idea of a good time.

If I started out with an uninterest in books, the Library Lady turned it into a mild antipathy with her little talk. I did later read the sports stories of John R. Tunis—*The All-American, The Kid from Tomkinsville, Highpockets, The Kid Comes Back*—all of which gave intense pleasure, but chiefly, I think, because they were about sports, which I loved much more than books. Still later, in high school, I read an occasional novel set in the slums—*A Stone for Danny Fisher, Knock on Any Door, The Hoods* are some of the titles that come to mind—but these were read at intervals of perhaps a year between books. Books assigned in school I did not read, and when a book report was due I generally faked it, writing about some great fat novel with the help of a Classic Comic. Books were simply no part of my life. A happy childhood is not easy to overcome.

But overcome it I did, to the point where I think I might be fairly defined as a bookish fellow, at any rate if one is to be judged by what he spends most of his time on. I rise early and, after putting on coffee, begin reading. If I do not read to earn my living, I read for pleasure. (I am one of those extremely lucky people for whom business and pleasure are nearly indivisible.) When I leave my apartment, I take a book or magazine with me. If I am driving, more often than not I read at stoplights. If I lunch alone, I read while eating. If I need to go to the bank, I

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read while waiting in line. I am able to read while walking (Macaulay was the great champion at this). Most of the day, when not talking or being talked to, I am reading. I read before dinner and I read after dinner. Unfortunately, I am a person who takes showers, so I forgo the pleasure of reading in the bath. I read while watching television; I read while music is playing in the background. When I recently had a bad cold, an even more bookish friend asked, "Can you at least read?" A list of human functions and activities in which I partake and during which I do not read would be notably short. The Library Lady was wrong. Books are not my friends; they have become much more like family, except that I probably spend more time with books than I do with my family.

Books are an addiction that, when aroused in earnest, is rarely calmed. Gertrude Stein once remarked what a relief it was for her to realize that she did not have to read all the books in the world. Any serious addict will know exactly what she meant, but the problem is that most of us want to read at least all the *good* books in the world—and of these alone there are altogether too many. In one of the world's good books, Maurice Baring's *The Puppet Show of Memory*, Baring writes about the many good books in the prerevolutionary summer home of his friend Count Benckendorff, and of a particular cupboard full of fine novels. "Before going to bed, we would dive into that cupboard, and one was always sure, even in the dark, of finding something one could read." This reminds me of friends who always put good books, both new and old, in their guest room, usually books suited to the guest's tastes. It is a lovely gesture of consideration, except that, when I have stayed with these friends, I am usually up half the night reading. Self-control around books is a thing I have not been able to learn; and sometimes, in the late hours, groggy and sated from too much reading, I will mutter, in transmuted form, the tag lines from two old Alka-Seltzer commercials of a decade or so ago: "I read too much, I read too fast" and "I guess I read *the whole thing*."

As for reading too fast—well, that is not quite true, and it gets less and less true all the time. Reading is one of those things at which, beyond a certain point, one does not get quicker with practice. Although I have not always been so, I am now a slow reader; and sometimes—with some books—I cannot read slowly enough. Apologies to Miss Evelyn Wood and her speed-reading institutes, but I see no clear advantage in hastening an activity that gives such pleasure. I find speed-reading an alien concept, certainly when applied to good and entertaining books; one may as well cultivate speed-eating or speed-love-making.

Yet the attraction of speed-reading is scarcely difficult to fathom. It panders to the desire to be able to read everything—and yet still be able, as one advertisement directed to college students has it, to go to the big dance. But though the desire to read everything may linger, at a certain age belief in its realization grows dim. One makes accommodations, little adjustments. Kant, as is widely known, used to practice what he called "cerebral hygiene," which meant that he read no journals, though he did, while never traveling much himself, love travel books ("they will take you to foreign shores, . . ."—could the Library Lady have visited eighteenth-century Königsberg?). Kant would have found my own cerebral hygiene dreadfully wanting, for I subscribe to some twelve or fifteen journals—weeklies, monthlies, and quarterlies among them. Justice Holmes comes closer to being my model. A great puritan in these matters, he was unable until in his seventies to marshal "the moral face" not to finish any book he began, and consequently slogged through many a bad book ("empty fortresses," he called them); but he did forgo reading newspapers. This is something that I do for long periods, and, negative pleasure though it is, it brings great happiness.

I have at various times been a three-newspaper-a-day man, the journalistic equivalent of a two-pack-a-day smoker. I grew up extracting first the comics from our family newspaper, then the sports pages. For years I took a newspaper with my morning coffee, habitually, the way other people take toast. I once had a job on a political magazine for which a thorough reading of each day's *New York Times* was a prerequisite to arriving at the office. This experience of enforced newspaper reading may have marked the beginning of the end, though the end itself came when I realized that it is the nature of newspapers to be picked up in a state of antici-

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pated excitement and laid down in disappointment. With newspaper reading generally, I should say, an awful lot goes a very short way. As things stand at present, I tend to miss newspapers grievously when they are shut down by a strike and not to read them when they are publishing.

Not that I have broken the newspaper habit completely. An old friend saves for me each Sunday's *New York Times Magazine* and its *Book Review*, and these I skim through in batches of six or seven at a sitting. A short while ago, with a sigh of real relief, I came to the end of a twenty-week trial subscription to the *Wall Street Journal*. It must be the best edited and least trivial of all current American newspapers; my problem is that it is triviality I crave in newspapers: a little murder, a little gossip, lots of circuses, plenty of fresh evidence of the privileged classes making fools of themselves. Although I crave these things, and the best contemporary newspapers tend to supply them in ample quantities—see any day's *New York Times* or *Washington Post*—I think I probably do better without them. Proust's M. Swann speaks as my alter-superego here:

> "The fault I find with our journalism is that it forces us to take an interest in some fresh triviality or other every day, whereas only three or four books in a lifetime give us anything that is of real importance. Suppose that, every morning, when we tore the wrapper off our paper with fevered hands, a transmutation were to take place, and we were to find inside it—oh! I don't know; shall we say Pascal's *Pensées*?" He articulated the title with an ironic emphasis so as not to appear pedantic. "And then, in the gilt and tooled volumes which we open once in ten years," he went on, showing that contempt for things of this world which some men of the world like to affect, "we should read that the Queen of the Hellenes had arrived at Cannes, or that the Princess de Léon had given a fancy dress ball. In that way we should arrive at the right proportion between 'information' and 'publicity.' "

Yet though M. Swann is surely correct, how easy it is to go on a straight news diet. I have spent days on which I have read a newspaper with breakfast; dressed to the morning television news; driven to work while listening to an all-day news broadcast; read another newspaper at lunch; returned home to the blare from the same radio news broadcast; watched the evening national news with a cocktail in hand; then watched the *MacNeil-Lehrer Report*; read *Newsweek* after dinner; and switched on the ten o'clock news before turning in at the end of—shall we say?—a highly informative day. I have spent such days, but I hope I never spend another. How many Americans do spend most of their days thus? Many hundreds of thousands, I should guess. Certainly most television and radio broadcasters must, and most newspaper editors as well. For myself, I should rather share the fate of the hero of Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*, who is forced to end his life imprisoned in the Brazilian jungle by a madman to whom he must read, over and over, the novels of Charles Dickens.

Reading Dickens over and over must have been Evelyn Waugh's idea of Hell, but, if I did not have to live in a Brazilian jungle, it comes closer to being my idea of Heaven. Allow me my major premise for a moment: if there is a Heaven, will it contain books? Or will the very need for books be expunged? There may be no need to read about foreign shores or treasures hitherto undreamed of. There may be no need even to dream of such treasures; they will presumably be there, on the premises, so to speak. But if there are no books in Heaven, then—as John Sparrow once remarked of Heaven if his dear friend Maurice Bowra were not there—I do not care to go. My own view is that there *will* be books in Heaven, but only in foreign languages, ancient and modern and even lost, all of which I shall be able to read with perfect ease.

As for Hell, will there be books there? The Abbé Mugnier, friend to Edith Wharton and the artists and intellectuals of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, was once asked if he, gentle soul that he was, believed in Hell. He said that since it was Church dogma that Hell existed, he believed in Hell, though he also believed there was no one in it. But if the sweet-natured Abbé was wrong, it seems unlikely that there will not be something to read in Hell. My own guess is that there will be no actual books, but only bound volumes of the *New York Times* op-ed pages.

But in either place, Heaven or Hell, I hope that there will be more to do than just read. High though reading is on my list of pleasures, I find it is a pleasure I can sustain for

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only a limited time. While I have, on more than a few occasions, sat up till dawn with a book—most of them novels, many of these Russian—generally two straight hours of reading, three at the utmost, is all I can take without needing a break. Roughly twenty years ago, I was able to read under optimal, or nearly desert island, conditions. I was in the army, stationed in a southern city where I knew no one; I lived in a furnished though by no means dismal apartment, with no radio, phonograph, or television set. On many workdays I was able to knock off at noon, and weekends were completely free. For a serious reader I am describing a situation bordering on the orgiastic. I sent home for books; I bought books; I took books out of the library. My afternoons, my evenings, my weekends, all were booked. Taking time out only for nourishment and hygiene, I read and read and read—and nearly went bonkers. What saved me was the purchase, from the local Sears, Roebuck, of a basketball. As in the joke whose punch line is "Hit the ball and drag Irving, hit the ball and drag Irving," I would read a book and shoot baskets, read a book and shoot baskets. Mae West said that there can't be too much of a good thing, but I think she was wrong.

The Guinness Book of World Records lists no records for reading, either for the most books read in a lifetime or for the longest period of sustained reading. For most books read, I should think that fairly high up on such a list would appear the names Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, Sainte-Beuve, Saintsbury, Edmund Wilson, and V. S. Pritchett. (If there were an annual list of the ten best-read men and women in America, incidentally, it seems unlikely that it would overlap much with those lists for the best-dressed men and women.) As for the longest sustained period of reading, this is even more difficult to guess at. Logan Pearsall Smith was said to disappear into his room and read for days at a time. The late Alexander Gerschenkron, in a fine essay in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR entitled "On Reading Books," mentioned that on two of the fifteen occasions when he finished reading *War and Peace*, he was so reluctant to depart the magic aura of that masterpiece that he turned the book over and started it again. In *The Calf and the Oak*, Solzhenitsyn reports that Alexander Tvardovsky, the editor of *Novy Mir* and a chain smoker, was so absorbed in his reading of Solzhenitsyn's then unknown novel *The First Circle* that he forgot to smoke. But perhaps the record for sustained reading belongs to a fictional character, the young hero of Somerset Maugham's novel, *The Razor's Edge*, who at his club, in a single sitting from morning till night, reads in its entirety William James's *The Principles of Psychology*.

To be able to read *The Principles of Psychology* in a single sitting would require a splendid chair or an iron bottom, preferably both, not to speak of great powers of concentration. Still, the conditions for reading are no trifling matter. Not that serious readers are daunted by rough conditions. I have a friend who has read all the novels of George Eliot on the subway, and all of Jane Austen and much Trollope and Mrs. Gaskell besides. I myself can read standing up, sitting down, on my back, stomach, or side. I read easily in moving cars; I read on beaches; and I find reading on airplanes especially luxurious. The only place I cannot read, in fact, is in libraries. I like libraries; I enjoy roaming about in them, walking through stacks, checking the periodical room, breathing in the atmosphere of them. Yet apart from checking books in and out or looking up an odd fact, I have always used libraries as hotels—that is, whenever I attempt to read in them for any length of time, I fall asleep. It is helpful to me to know that, should I ever develop insomnia, a day at the Bodleian or Widener or even my local branch library could cure it easily.

Part of my problem is that I frequently find something slightly artificial in the libraries' attempt to make people comfortable: an eagerness to please that, heartfelt though it may be, does not quite come off. (As an example of what I mean, I once asked a librarian of a local library in Texas if she had a copy of Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government*. "No," she replied, "I am afraid not. But we have other nice books on government.") One can accommodate oneself to true discomfort, but to work under modern library conditions of quasi or ostensible comfort is more than I can stand. Besides, I like to read with my tools around. I read, for one thing, with a pencil in my hand. If the book I am reading is my own, I mark lightly, with a vertical line along the margin, pas-

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sages I might want to return to. (That's correct, Library Lady, I mark up my books' pages.) If I come across something connected with other work I am doing, I scribble down a note about it on an index card. If I come across something of general interest (such as this Russian proverb: "Do not call in a wolf when dogs attack you"), I write it in a notebook I keep on the table near my chair. On this table also sits a French and an English dictionary, and more often than not a cup of coffee or tea. This reading is a serious business.

I certainly take it seriously, so much so that I find myself quite unable to read pleasantly trashy things in good conscience. Take detective fiction. Apart from some stories of Conan Doyle and a single novel by Simenon, I have read no other detective fiction in my life. I do not wish to seem sniffy here. In the debate once begun by Edmund Wilson's famous essay about detective fiction, "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?," I used to think myself solidly on the side of the couldn't-careless crowd. What I found, though, is that I can care all too easily. Georges Simenon is a highly seductive writer, but he is said to have written more than one hundred Maigret novels alone. No, no, no, I cannot start up with him. Like a man with a serious weight problem, I cannot keep such candy around the house. I would rather indulge my curiosity about old Ackroyd's demise at the movies, or on television, where only a few wasted hours are entailed.

In my reading, as in a few other departments of my life, I have come to hold what many may consider to be a philistine assumption: that everyone dies some day—yes, Virginia, even you and I. As near as I am able to concentrate upon such a dark thought, I hold with Montaigne, who said "We must be always booted and ready to go, so far as it is in our power." "Booted" to me includes being as well read as possible. I am not sure that I should go so far as Justice Holmes, who used to say that he was worried lest Saint Peter ask whether he had read some dull book that he was supposed to have read. Yet the assumption that time is all the more valuable because limited makes it easier to eschew fat and pretentious volumes whose tendency is easily enough guessed. Saint Peter, surely, is not likely to query anyone about Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s biography of Robert Kennedy, except possibly Professor Schlesinger himself about why he wrote such a book to begin with.

And now a philistine confession to go with a philistine assumption: I read in the hope of discovering the truth, or at least some truths. I look for truth in what some might deem odd places: novels and poems, histories and memoirs, biographies and autobiographies, letters and diaries. Many of these are literary, but then, as Desmond MacCarthy once wrote, "It is the business of literature to turn facts into ideas." In reading for truth, you understand, I am not seeking a full game plan, some large system that will explain the world to me, or a patent for bliss. Instead I seek clues that might explain life's oddities, that might light up the dark corners of existence a little, that might correct foolish ideas I have come to hold too dearly, that might, finally, make my own stay here more interesting, if not necessarily more pleasant. When I read in a book by Solzhenitsyn, "No, we must not hide behind fate's petticoats, the most important decisions in our lives, when all is said, we make for ourselves," I sit up and make note of it. When I read in a line by Marianne Moore that "we must have the courage of our peculiarities," I not only sit up, I want to dance to it.

Not that this grown man dancing with small truths does not take pleasure in the music. I take immense pleasure. So much so that the puritan in me tends to distrust something that I enjoy so much. Part of the pleasure is in the splendor of language properly deployed, but an even greater part comes from satisfying one's curiosity. If lust has an intellectual equivalent, might it not be curiosity which is allowed free rein? Though few are the books I regret having read, much of my reading has been altogether desultory—and continues to be. Gazing upon a shelf of books I have not yet read but soon hope to, I find the following items: *Diaghilev* by Richard Buckle, *Sabbatai Sevi* by Gershom Scholem, *Anthony Trollope* by James Pope Hennessy, *Collected Poems* by Roy Fuller, *The Sitwells* by John Pearson, *Chateaubriand* by George D. Painter, *The Apathetic Bookie Joint* by Daniel Fuchs, *Lermontov* by Laurence Kelley, *A Short Life of Kierkegaard* by Walter Lowrie, and *History of the Idea of Progress* by Robert Nisbet. Separately these books repre-

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sent many amusing and instructive hours; taken together they do not, as they say down at the gas station, make a whole hell of a lot of sense.

"You can either read books or write them, but you can't do both." I do not know whose mot that is, but when I first heard it I thought it clever but without substance. Yet I have since come to wonder if perhaps there may not be some truth in it. One day a few years ago I had lunch with an author of many books, some long and monumental and others short and subtle. In the course of our lunch I mentioned having read a newly published novel. He said that he hadn't. I later referred to Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag* volumes. He had not read them. I brought up a recent biography that had made a stir. Nope, he hadn't read it either. Finally, he said: "Look, I must tell you something. I don't read anything except books and articles that have to do with the two books I am myself currently working on. It isn't that I don't want to read other things, you understand; it's only that I can't find time to do it." I have since noticed the same thing in other productive writers whom I know. They may be intelligent, penetrating, even wise, but they tend not to be very well read. They use books, they scrounge around in them, they dig out from books what they need, but always with a purpose. The writers I mentioned earlier as among the best read—Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, Sainte-Beuve, Saintsbury, Edmund Wilson, V. S. Pritchett—are chiefly known as essayists. Perhaps they read too much to write full-blown books. Like the man said, you can read 'em or write 'em, but you cannot do both.

As someone who for the most part reads 'em, I recently was interested to find Wallace Stevens (in *The Letters of Wallace Stevens*) expressing more than once his distrust of reading. Stevens was far from being anti-intellectual, but he seems to have concurred with the general view set forth in the above paragraph, even to the point of remarking that "that particular vice [reading] is the deadly enemy of writing." Of course Stevens was a poet, with a need for what T. S. Eliot called the "necessary laziness" of the poet, by which he meant a freeing of the mind from things that will "encroach upon his necessary receptivity." Still, it was Stevens who first put the notion in my impressionable mind that reading and thinking are not always coterminous activities. Writing to his young Cuban friend José Rodriguez Feo, Stevens said that he would "try to raise a question in your mind as to the value of reading. True, the desire to read is an insatiable desire and you must read. Nevertheless, you must also think." Stevens advised Feo to spend an hour or two a day at pure thinking, "even if in the beginning you are staggered by the confusion and aimlessness of your thoughts."

Whether Señor Feo took Wallace Stevens's advice is not known, but I did, at least partially and in somewhat exaggerated form. I determined to set aside a day on which I would do no reading—none whatsoever: no books, no magazines, no newspapers, no mail. The only thing I would read, I vowed, would be stop signs. The day I picked for printlessness was a Saturday. I did not expect it to be an easy day to get through. In fact, before turning in on the eve of this day-without-print, I fortified myself with a final snack, a tasty little Henry James essay on George Sand.

I woke Saturday morning with one thought on my mind: how am I going to get through this day? Whereas normally I shuffle into the kitchen to make coffee, then flop into my chair with a book, this morning I merely flopped into my chair. "It adds tremendously to the leisure space of life," Wallace Stevens wrote, "not to pick up a book every time one sits down." Too true. It was not yet 7:00 A.M. and already I had begun feeling the pressure of additional leisure space on my life. I sat in my chair and awaited thought, but it was no more punctual than Godot. After breakfast, since thought or anything remotely resembling it had still not arrived, I went out on errands. I purchased stamps, tea, shoe polish. I had not shined my own shoes for a number of years, and this clearly was the perfect day to do so. Walking about my apartment I noted how no room in it seemed free of reading matter, and I began to feel rather like a man attempting to quit smoking who has been locked in overnight at Dunhill's.

After lunch I listened to music: some Brahms, a Beethoven quartet, an album of songs sung by Lucien Fugère of the Opéra Comique. I watched a bit of a tennis match on television; I dozed in my chair; I arose and went for a short walk. I began to feel a tremor of irri-

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tability in myself. I thought about what I might read tomorrow. Somewhere I think I had something resembling an idea, which had to do with a technical solution to a problem I had been having with a piece of writing. But of grand thoughts, sweeping syntheses I can claim none. As dusk crept up, the day seemed interminable. Time hung heavier than in a Laundromat. What was it that Cornelius Ryan called his book on the invasion of Normandy, *The Longest Day*? Mr. Ryan, you don't know the half of it.

Yet this experiment was not altogether for naught. If nothing else, it demonstrated my dependence on books, which is utter and complete. "It has struck me," wrote Pascal in a famous passage, "that all men's misfortunes spring from the single cause that they are unable to stay quietly in one room." Ah, but Monsieur Pascal, I have sat quietly in one room and to scarcely any avail. I need books, Monsieur. The engine that is my mind will not turn over without a book in my hand. If it comes to that, I am ready to write fewer books in order to read more; besides, in intellectual life perhaps it is better to receive than to give. That I can be happy reading books I count a great blessing. Books have brought me treasures hitherto undreamed of and, I tell you frankly, I want more such treasures. Books have taken me to foreign shores, and I am not keen to return from them. Oh, Library Lady, you were right all along. Please, I beg you, accept my apology.

Art Gallery

JOHN DICKSON

Nude Beneath the Willows, leaves hanging down.
Nude Descending Staircase, beige and brown.
Nude in an Armchair. Nude on a Train.
Nude Bathers bathing in the summer rain.

Nude in the Forest. Nude in the Street.
Nude on the Sofa, lonely and discreet.
Nude Under Pine Tree, bent out of shape
breast for an elbow and head like a grape.

Nude without bikini, tan here and there.
Nude in the Meadow drifting through the air.
Nude in the coffee shop glaring at me
wearing dress and raincoat that I can't see.

✪ JOHN DICKSON's first collection of poetry, *Victoria Hotel*, was published last year by Chicago Review Press.

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Compassion

CLIFFORD ORWIN

TAKING STOCK, UPON THE DEATH OF LYNDON JOHNSON, of all the crises besetting the Republic, James Reston put the great choice confronting us as that between a competitive society and a compassionate one. Dr. Theodore Isaac Rubin, in his *Compassion and Self-Hate,* commends to those of us seeking peace of mind a life of self-compassion rather than one of its alternative, self-hate. Jimmy Carter promised to make the government "as good, as compassionate," as the American people. And a YMCA day camp, advertising in the Keene, New Hampshire, *Shopper News,* promises to teach arts and crafts, but above all compassion.

In a time when reverence is not flourishing, compassion is that rare thing which partakes of the sacred. We not only admire but stand in awe of it, and many discern nothing holier in people than their capacity for it. Our saints—Gandhi, Popes John XXIII and John Paul I, Sister Theresa—are compassion's saints. The great humanitarian enjoys a unique authority, and many of the most decent Americans have come to reinterpret decency primarily in terms of compassion.

Most decent Americans are liberals, and it is with liberals that we tend to associate compassion. Contemporary liberalism, indeed, as Kenneth Minogue has remarked, "cannot be understood unless it is seen to possess an emotional unity" originating in a "compassionate sensibility." Liberal, as Americans know, is the noun that follows "bleeding heart," an inept insult which never smarts. The reproach to which liberals are sensitive is the opposite one of insensitivity. This is an arrow that strikes mainly from the left.

Compassion is not the only thing that liberals cherish. We may, however, reasonably conclude that it is what they cherish most. Time and again in the past fifteen years, in many places but most of all on campus, the reproach of "insensitivity" has swept all before it. This does not, as some have alleged, expose today's liberalism as unprincipled. Rather that when put to the test, its principle proves to be compassion.

The test of our devotion to such principles as may be sometimes in tension is which we will sacrifice to which. By this standard, compassion may claim pride of place in the contemporary liberal pantheon. Among

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the things that it will excuse, for instance, is a significant degree of intolerance—in particular, intolerance of the "insensitive" by those who claim to act on behalf of the victims of this insensitivity. At the very least, this claim has served to extenuate intolerance sufficiently to quench all anger and hence all appetite for punishing. Reminders of the necessity of tolerance, conversely, do not excuse, and are frequently taken to mask, "insensitivity." (This explains why they are so often uttered defensively or even apologetically.)

The more questionable liberalism has seemed because the more liberals have questioned it, the less they have inclined to question compassion. In circumstances of liberal loss of confidence in much of the heritage of liberalism, a lack of compassion, or of reverence for it, has come to amount to apostasy from liberalism. (This consideration powerfully informs liberal distrust of "neoconservatism," which otherwise might be as plausibly regarded—as in fact it tends to regard itself—as "neoliberalism.") Liberals today seem unsure of their ground except when they are taking their stand on compassion. They do indeed wear their compassion as their medallion, as Senator John Glenn advised in his keynote address at the last Democratic presidential convention.

II

Compassion is as old as the race. As a political principle it is much younger. "It is by no means a matter of course," notes Hannah Arendt in *On Revolution*, "for the spectacle of misery to move men to pity; even during the long centuries when the Christian religion of mercy determined moral standards of Western civilization, compassion operated outside the political realm and frequently outside the established hierarchy of the Church." The debut of political compassion followed closely upon that of modern representative government. Its function has been to vouch for representativeness when other tokens have not sufficed to do so.

The most obvious such token is consent. In mentioning representation before consent I may have seemed to put the cart before the horse. It is true that, formally speaking, representative government figures in the modern doctrine of politics primarily as a means of realizing "government by the consent of the governed." In the course of the past two centuries, however, two things have happened that are crucial to the political career of compassion. Consent has ceased to seem sufficient to vouch for true representativeness. And sometimes it has even ceased to seem necessary to vouch for it.

The second and more extreme of these developments could flourish only in the present century. We know it from fascism and Leninism—

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self-anointed representatives of the nation and the proletariat, respectively. Each rests upon a sympathy with the "objective" aspirations of the "represented" which it anticipates in the hope of evoking them. If it is indeed compassion which, as Hannah Arendt says, "has haunted and driven the best men of all the revolutions," then so it was compassion that conferred their mandate. Along the way of modern politics, representativeness, and with it compassion, has come, particularly in times of crisis, to usurp the first place from consent.

The first representatives to be haunted by the insufficiency of consent were the Jacobins in the National Assembly. They had stood for election and had won it. They remained nonetheless deeply preoccupied with the question of their representativeness. United by common grievances, all classes of the Third Estate had risen against the old regime. Together they had shredded its tattered web of mutual political obligations. Seigneur and serf were no more. The comfortable and the wretched remained. Inevitably, what shaped the concerns of the people was their surpassing misery. It thus came about that not useless freedom but "happiness," as Miss Arendt quotes the terrible Saint-Just, had necessarily to become "the new idea in Europe." This same misery, however, debarred the people from significant political participation. The principal actors in the revolutionary drama were not, therefore, men of the people. They were that very different middle-class breed, the people's elected "representatives."

The Jacobins were painfully aware of the gulf that separated them from their constituents. They were thus led to break in crucial respects with the Anglo-Saxon founders of the theory of representative government. Following Rousseau, they came to deny that representativeness could be vouched for by consent, that "you consented to be governed by me" is properly tantamount to "I am your rightful representative." No doubt Jacobins questioned this premise in part because their opponents in the Assembly, whom they were strongly minded to annihilate, were not less hallowed by suffrage than themselves. But they also may have doubted in their hearts their title to speak for those who had returned them. They had learned from Rousseau that representatives will share, quite apart from their particular interests, a corporate interest common to them all, and that nature will necessarily incline them to prefer both of these interests to the public one. This, according to Rousseau, is a difficulty which the proper institutional arrangements may temper but which it is impossible wholly to resolve. On their own, the Jacobins had learned, glancing from their own lot to that of their electors, that the well-fed do not adequately represent the starving, for they do not act on their behalf with quite the urgency with which the hungry feel their pangs. Nor was this a problem which could be solved by elevating to

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public office some few of the suffering many. These, by virtue of their newly found eminence, would cease to be members of the suffering many. Rousseau had been entirely correct: to represent was to misrepresent. Yet no great nation could conduct its affairs except by means of representation.

This, then, was the dilemma to which compassion and only compassion seemed to hold the solution. Miss Arendt has recorded the heroic frenzies of commiseration which in the eyes of the Jacobins served to vindicate their rule and the Terror that issued from it. The way of the Jacobin as preached by Robespierre was that of an ascetic or athlete of the imagination, a novel secular way of the cross and meditation upon the passion of the sansculottes. Such a sympathetic sharing of sorrows would do more than supply the absence of a bond of common interest between leaders and led. It would create a real unity of feeling, a genuine and thoroughgoing solidarity between them. Compassion alone could transmute the comfortable into true representatives of the wretched.

Our own revolution never moved from Miss Arendt's "political question"—the question of "the constitution of freedom"—to her "social" one. The bond of interest between leaders and led—a common interest in freedom both as an end and as a means to other ends—was never sundered. While the Parisian throngs were to find themselves impotent before their misery, the American people found in independence the guarantor of prosperity and of the opportunities for increasing it inherent in a fortunate situation. There emerged from the revolution, to be sure, a more and a less popular party. The struggle between them, however, fell so far short of a Terror as to issue in an era of good feeling. Rich and poor disagreed, within limits, over what version of limited democratic order would most conduce to the general and equal pursuit of happiness. Neither showed any inclination to proceed to guaranteeing happiness itself. Freedom was to remain the new idea in America. There would be no awful chasm between represented and representatives, no dispossessed multitude to attract compassion—or to demand it.

The greatest achievement of our founders proved to be to make class struggle safe for democracy. Like other places, America has smoldered with distrust between rich and poor. For the longest time, however, such distrust did not lead, as in France, to the political apotheosis of compassion. (Abolitionism comprises a partial exception; but the slaves were without rather than within the arena of American politics.) Instead, America knew populism, which was as different from Jacobinism as Andrew Jackson was from Robespierre. The common man demanded attention, but did not conceive it as the consequence of the leap of a compassionate imagination. He sought it rather in a concrete community of origins, tastes, and suspicions. The wealthy combated this by parading

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their popular beginnings and popular ways. Populism is as old as democracy—the finest speeches of this genre extant are to be found in Thucydides. When the rhetoric of compassion must supplement it, democracy is in deep trouble.

Lincoln was the first American statesman to move beyond populism to compassion. Unlike Stephen Douglas and others of the time, Lincoln was never a straightforward populist. He saw too clearly the inadequacy of the populist principle of "popular sovereignty" to deal with the issue of slavery. He was therefore driven to restore an understanding of democracy alike more flexible and more principled than that of blunt majoritarianism. Nor, subsequently, would the shrill stridency of populism serve for the tragic crisis of civil war. As an ordeal of such magnitude must confer unprecedented power upon the presidency, so it necessarily imposes a unique burden upon the president. It is hardly tolerable either to him or to us that our democratic leader, as such not our ruler but our servant, should dispose, on the most massive scale, of the lives and happiness of us, his masters. Shelley's "sneer of cold command"—perhaps better interpreted as an expression of divine impassivity—is admirably suited to a pharaoh's presentation of himself to his people. With a president the matter stands otherwise. What lightens the burdens that he lays upon us is only that they weigh heavily upon him, and if we accept the sorrows that he enjoins upon us it is on condition that they be sorrows to him.

Strangely but also intelligibly, then, the democratic commander in chief, precisely because his authority rests only on the consent of his equals, must evince a compassionate solicitude toward them in order to make his primacy *inter pares* bearable. It was this quality which people sensed in FDR, and which those who loved Lincoln cherished in him.

Lincoln's profound humanity was an exception. That of FDR, however, has proved the harbinger of a rule. The "imperial presidency" has seen to that. We insist that its incumbent suffer from the loneliness of power by way of compensating the rest of us who suffer from the lack of it.

Nor is it in respect to the presidency only that we currently look to compassion as the guarantor of responsiveness. At every level of the political system there is dissatisfaction with what I earlier called the usual tokens of representativeness.

In these times of voter alienation, whoever would command our suffrage must contrive to remain one of us, rather than to become one of them. Whether running for election or for reelection, the wise candidate, as Richard Fenno has observed, will "run for Congress by running against Congress." This of course recalls populism, and certain old-fashioned populists have profited from the current situation. The matter

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is not, however, primarily one of class, but of a distrust of government which abounds in every class. The chasm to be bridged is not one yawning between rich and poor, but between all politicians and the rest of us. The sympathies we demand of officeholders are, therefore, less precise, more protean, than those usually expected of populists. There is the vague but deep desire that they be attuned to feel what we are feeling, as if the compassion of the powerful were the final refuge of the powerless, the last thing capable of making the one into true representatives of the other.

There is also the fact that we have seen, at last, the enfranchisement of blacks and others until now largely excluded from politics. For many of them the ballot, and more besides, has not sufficed to cure the poverty which they contracted from their oppression. In this rhetorically crucial respect—if not in so many others—our chronically poor resemble the sansculottes. And our liberals recall the Jacobins, at least in believing that the comfortable ought to respond to the poor with compassion.

In these circumstances compassion has proved almost uniquely capable of disarming electoral cynicism. It appeals to the powerless by assuring them that there are those in power who make their cares their own; and it appeals to the disinterested because that is what it presents itself as being.

III

The question remains, however, why so many people today regard compassion as moral bedrock. The deepest reason is the most elusive. It is the impact on the West of two millennia of Christianity—as modified by the impact of five centuries of its decline.

It would be hard to exaggerate either the novelty or the profundity of the Christian revaluation of compassion. Classical antiquity had adorned its temples with images of resplendent beings—perfect and permanent, soliciting wonder, beyond change and so beyond pity. Suffering on view in the ancient temples was not that of the gods, but of those impudent enough to offend them. The images of such suffering could be heartrending—consider the group of the Niobids, formerly ascribed to Praxiteles—but the priests of the god did not offer them so as to solicit compassion. They were warnings. And even the rather late *Laocoön*, for all of its unclassical excess, remains but an image of human suffering. It was left to Christianity to confound the world by introducing into it a God whose sufferings—just because He was God—exceeded the sum of those previously decreed for the bitterest enemies of the gods.

The Christian God was not the first—and has not been the last—compassionate One. The Jewish God is long-suffering, slow to anger, and

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Allah is the "all-merciful, the all-compassionate." Nor was He the first god to suffer: consider Dionysus, Demeter, and the other gods of the mystery cults. But only He "so loved mankind" that He became flesh and suffered more than flesh could bear that men might be redeemed from eternal suffering. Through His supreme commiseration for men, the Christian God becomes, in His Incarnation, the supreme *Object* of man's commiseration. Only in Christian iconography does the very Principle of Being cry out to us in anguish.

The Christian life, moreover, was the life of the imitation of Christ, inspired by the contemplation of His Passion. The good Christian "took up the Cross"; he took upon himself the sufferings to which God submitted for his sake. It was through suffering that God had reached out to him and through which he had to reach out to God. The authoritative human models, therefore, approached God primarily in their self-sacrifice. In the images of the suffering God, He is often accompanied by His grieving Mother and some of His saints, martyred or self-mortifying, sufferers not from disobedience to God but in their obedience to Him. These comprised a novel aristocracy of suffering. Pity had become the basis of piety, of love of God and imitation of Him. To commiserate deeply with God was to come to love Him and so to aspire to His boundless love and compassion for man. Men were to love one another as He had loved them and from their love of Him. This love depended upon their pity for Him, upon their grasp of the enormity of His sufferings on their behalf. Thus it was that an image which both depicted and solicited pity for the murdered deity—the *pietà*—took its place in the forefront of Christian art.

Theologians remained capable of distinguishing piety from pity. The peoples of Christendom, however, expressing themselves in their vernaculars, were liable to confuse the two. In English as in Italian and French, to act "for pitty's sake" (*per pietà, par pitié*), as a Christian ought, was to act from each conceived as the other. Only quite late did Latinate "piety" secede in form and meaning from Anglo-Norman "pitty."

Obviously there are distinctions to draw between humanitarianism and Christianity. In its resolute this-worldliness, belief in the inherent goodness of man, and indifference to our relations with God—in its preaching of the brotherhood of man without the fatherhood of God—humanitarianism represents a departure from, and even a revolt against, Christianity. Even so, what Nietzsche called "*la religion de la souffrance*" is a transformation of Christianity which as such presupposes and depends upon it. It appeals to something which because of Christianity is second nature, and this is one source of its insistent power.

Still and all, the fact that we are so used to compassion cannot by itself explain why we cherish it. Too many other Christian habits have

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fallen by the wayside. Nor is it among old-fashioned Christians that the rhetoric of compassion flourishes. Like so many to whom it appeals, compassion is neither religious nor irreligious. It is post-religious. People today remain deeply convinced that it is their duty to help the unfortunate, and this is a legacy of Christianity. They are at the same time profoundly reluctant to treat the disadvantaged paternalistically, or to "impose our values on them." They strive to be nonjudgmental, and this has enhanced the importance of compassion even as it has altered its meaning. Compassion has become synonymous with sensitivity or openness, with every response to other people that attests concern untainted by censoriousness. It implies caring without judging, and acting morally while refraining from enacting one's own morals. Ours is a time which, relativistic in theory, feels that it is good to do good—but bad to impose a notion of the good. Compassion neatly splits the difference between Christian moralism and post-Christian moral relativism.

Compassion also profits from the beating taken by ordinary workaday morality. No longer does it seem enough to say that honesty is the best policy. "In the United States," observed Tocqueville in 1831, "hardly anybody talks of the beauty of virtue, but they maintain that virtue is useful and prove it every day. . . . [They] are fond of explaining almost all [their] actions . . . by the principle of self-interest rightly understood; they show with complacency how an enlightened regard for themselves constantly prompts them to assist one another. [Even when they perform acts of spontaneous benevolence,] they would seldom admit that they yield to emotions of this kind; they are more anxious to do honour to their philosophy than to themselves."

And on the whole Tocqueville approved of this, given the requirements of democracy. "The principle of self-interest rightly understood is not a lofty one, but it is clear and sure. [It] produces no great acts of self-sacrifice, but it suggests daily small acts of self-denial. By itself it cannot suffice to make a man virtuous; but it disciplines a number of persons in habits of regularity, temperance, moderation, foresight, self-command; and if it does not lead men straight to virtue by the will, it gradually draws them in that direction by their habits."

This popular utilitarianism has been for our morality what the small town has been for our society. Solid, hopeful, and philistine, it animated a way of life as unlikely to soar as it was to plunge. Today it is on the ropes, with other established and pedestrian institutions. We have disc jockeys chirping that today we should do something nice for ourselves for a change, and we overhear sales clerks advising each other that their first obligation is to themselves. We have libertarianism, liberation, and assertiveness training. With such ready access to moralistic vindications of selfishness, we cannot but disdain as near beer the old selfish vindica-

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tion of morality. And if we take our selfishness moralized, we seem to prefer our morality straight. When we choose to travel morally, why not go first class? Our concern with being ourselves tells doubly against calculated morality. It is repulsive alike because it demands so much of us in the way of irksome self-restraint and because it demands so little in the way of genuine concern for others. It rarely permits us to be really nice either to ourselves or to others.

Not so compassion. As Burke remarked of an earlier upsurge of it: "the Parisian . . . philosophers explode or render odious or contemptible, that class of virtues which restrain the appetite. . . . In the place of all this they substitute a virtue which they call humanity or benevolence." Benevolence charms more than most moralities, and chafes less. It emphasizes gratifying others rather than denying oneself. A true Christian, says Rousseau, is hard on himself and easy on others. A mellow person can be easy on both. Compassion is expansive, not puritanical; except where maddened by guilt, it does not cramp our style.

For all of these reasons we tend to place great hopes on compassion. But are we right to do so?

IV

Much of the thinking about fellow-feeling has explored the opposition, underlined by James Reston, between compassion and competitiveness. The one suggests looking out for oneself; the other, sensitivity to the needs of others. Opposite effects, however, need not follow from opposite causes. The skein of human feelings is a tangled one. Explorations of Mr. Reston's opposition have a way of calling it into question.

Consider, for instance, the observations of Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*. The context is one of advice to orators, so the author offers an analysis of the different feelings to which speakers may appeal. Among these is pity or compassion (ἔλεος). "Pity we may take to be a pain at some manifest evil . . . befalling someone undeservedly, when the evil is of a kind that we might anticipate striking ourselves or those close to us. . . . To sum up, we may conclude that anything that we fear for ourselves, we pity when it happens to others."

These observations are common sense. They imply no "theory" of compassion. More recent thinkers, however, have tended to try to squeeze one out of them. In deference to the premises of modern science, they have sought to portray compassion mechanistically, as the effect of some prior determinate cause. They will reformulate Aristotle's account of the *conditions* of compassion as evidence for its *causes*. They end by reducing commiseration to merely a variant of fear for our-

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selves—one which ultimately rests on our confusing our neighbor with ourselves. They explain it as the outcome of a psychological process of identification, or, as it has more recently come to be called, projective empathy. There is no such thing, to this way of thinking, as a selfless concern for others; compassion is no exception to this rule.

The first and clearest exponent of this view was Hobbes. In 1627 he prepared, as far as we know for his own future reference, an English digest of the *Rhetoric*. Echoes of this digest recur throughout Hobbes's mature writings, usually with changes reflecting his own trailblazing innovations. Here is the relevant passage on compassion in the digest, where the thought is still that of Aristotle, and its counterpart in *Human Nature* (1640), Hobbes's first elaboration of his own mechanistic psychology.

> *Pity* is a perturbation of the mind, arising from the apprehension of hurt or trouble to another that doth not deserve it, and which he thinks may happen to himself or his. (*The Whole Art of Rhetoric*, II, x)
>
> *Pity* is *imagination* or *fiction* of *future* calamity to ourselves, proceeding from the sense of another man's calamity. (*Human Nature*, IX, 10)

What Aristotle offers as one condition of pity—that we not feel ourselves immune to the sufferings that we witness—Hobbes identifies as its cause or essence. Other considerations vanish—or are reinterpreted so as to reduce them to this one. Consider, for instance, the fate of the proviso "that doth not deserve it" in Hobbes's treatment of compassion in *Leviathan* (1651).

> Grief, for the calamity of another, is PITY; and ariseth from the imagination that the like calamity may befall himself; and therefore is called COMPASSION, and in the phrase of this present time a FELLOW-FEELING: and therefore for calamity arriving from great wickedness, the best men have the least pity; and for the same calamity, those have the least pity, that think themselves least [vulnerable] to the same. (*Leviathan*, Chapter Six)

There is in fellow-feeling, as Hobbes conceives it, no trace of justice or impartiality. Not everyone feels less pity when the wicked suffer; only the just do. And they do so not for reasons of justice—let alone because justice is intrinsic to pity—but merely because the case of the wicked seems far from their own. Conversely, it would be primarily the just who were moved at the misfortunes of someone just—again, merely from considerations of proximity.

Hobbes is clear on why pity can be so uncomfortable an experience. Commiseration is merely fear, arising at the intimation of our weakness offered by someone else's suffering. When I act out of compassion, similarly, it is with foresight of some good to myself—"to deliver [my] mind

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from the pain of [it]." My apparent unselfish concern for others is my disguised selfish concern for myself.

This general approach to compassion is ubiquitous among modern thinkers. We encounter it in the Scottish and French Enlightenments; in Rousseau, from whom the Romantics learned it; in the "associationist" psychologies of the nineteenth-century universities; in the quasi-biological psychologies inspired by Darwin; and in the twentieth-century successors to all these tendencies. A few diehards have held out against it. For better or for worse, however, and despite innumerable disagreements, variations, and refinements, Hobbes's perspective has defined the terms of three centuries of theorizing about compassion.

Such an interpretation of fellow-feeling is not a very exalted one. It might lead to cynicism concerning compassion's moral possibilities. In fact its tendency has proved the opposite, precisely because of its "realism." Commiseration, according to this view, is not something airy (or godlike). As a diversion into broader channels of our attachment to our preservation, it courses with the power of our primal concern as living beings. Precisely because I care about myself, I am prone to caring also about my neighbor. In the words of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the most sophisticated as well as most radical exponent of this understanding of compassion:

> But when the strength of an expansive soul makes me identify myself with my fellow and I feel that I am, so to speak, in him, it is in order not to suffer that I do not want him to suffer; I am interested in him for love of myself, and the reason for the precept [of the Golden Rule] is in nature itself, which inspires in me the desire of my well-being in whatever place I feel my existence. . . . Love of men derived from love of self is the principle of human justice.
>
> —*Emile, or Education,* Book Four, translated by Allan Bloom

The compassionate man loves his neighbor as himself because his self has wandered into his neighbor. It would be misleading to interpret this as what philosophy departments call altruism. It would also be pointless. Compassion renders selflessness superfluous. Therein lies its beauty as Rousseau conceives it.

To grasp this, think of how morality pinches. Every scheme of ethics demands that in important respects we practice self-restraint. There may be more to life, of course, than satisfying those passions that morality opposes. There may be more to us than those passions. But we all first come to know morality, and for the most part continue to know it, as denial. Life is therefore a struggle with ourselves from which we always emerge the losers, condemned either by morality or to it.

Our experience of compassion, however, betrays no such rift between

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inclination and duty. That is why Burke could distinguish between "benevolence" and those virtues that oppose our appetites. We should help, and we feel like helping. Compassion comprises a happy exception to the general run of our brushes with probity. Rather than opposing our most fundamental selfish inclinations, it actually mobilizes them. Acting on it we are acting on them. Self-concern, so often the root of moral foot-dragging, here appears as morality's ally. Compassion's current bears me swiftly, surely, and without obstruction to attend to the suffering of my neighbor. And although and because compassion is painful, to act on it and thereby to allay it is pleasant. Compassion finesses the problem of the weakness of morality.

This understanding of compassion is, then, both intriguing and hopeful. It is also forceful and clear and capable of considerable refinement. Does it, however, square with our experience of what it professes to explain? Fear and trembling on our own behalf is surely one aspect of our response to the spectacle of suffering. But is that all?

In fact, experience distinguishes compassion from all forms of anguish on our own behalf, including those arising from our contemplation of the sorrows of others. Consider the case of "sympathetic suffering," symptoms contracted by means of suggestion. When I so much as read about a disease of the skin or eyes, I begin to itch or my eyes to quiver, and I know that I am not alone in this. Here I take a step in the direction of suffering precisely as the victim suffers, yet no one would understand this as compassion. Some people, upon hearing of your backache, promptly come down with one of their own. This is not compassion, first because compassion is not a backache. It is, moreover, ***their*** backache, and that is why it preoccupies them; the original sufferer has receded from view. Hypochondriacs are not known for their compassion. When they do feel it, it is something quite distinct from their hypochondria. By fellow-feeling we do not mean feeling what our fellow is feeling.

This distinction between compassion and replication also holds for privations of the soul. There are circumstances—panic is one, exultation another—in which we become "infected" with one another's passions. There are others in which we share the same grief or joy from experiencing the same loss or gain. None is an instance of compassion. As Max Scheler has pointed out in ***The Nature of Sympathy***, we do not say of parents who have lost a daughter that the relation between them is one of compassion. We say that they share a common sorrow. If each also commiserates with the other, that is a separate and different feeling. Nor does our compassion for the bereaved consist of experiencing their pain. We need feel no grief ourselves in order to sympathize with that of our fellow.

To know fellow-feeling, then, is distinct from being a fellow sufferer.

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Compassion is for *someone else's* suffering, whether or not we happen to share it. (In fact, as the case of hypochondria confirms, we are more likely to respond to sufferings that we do not share, be it in truth or in imagination, for our own suffering tends to preempt our attention.) However painful compassion may be, it is painful *as* compassion, not as a backache or as bereavement. It is a state of mind quite distinct from that of the particular suffering that evokes it. And that means that we cannot understand it as the imaginative replication of the suffering that has evoked it.

It is no contradiction of this that some people's idea of compassion is to assure the patient that they too suffer—and that they may even persuade themselves that they do, all by way of consoling both themselves and him. This they do not because they think that compassion for a backache ought to take the form of a backache and wish to give a good account of themselves. (Instead they may offer a toothache, or even their troubles in meeting their mortgage.) It is rather that they have heard that misery loves company. Their motive—their compassion—remains distinct from whatever symptoms it may lead them to profess.

Fear for ourselves, arising from viewing the misfortunes of others, is, Hobbes notwithstanding, the last thing that compassion is. No one who has known both will readily confuse them. (Hobbes does so because he has an ax to grind.) Consider, for instance, the following passage from the pseudonymous narrative of *Ralph Rashleigh*, the memoir of a convict transported to Australia. Rashleigh, who is next in line for sentencing, witnesses the condemnation of a cell mate to hanging.

> While the unhappy man struggled against completely breaking down . . . the chaplain addressed him with a homily on the need for prayer and repentance, which the fellow seemed not to hear. Rashleigh, fear tightening his heartstrings, watched his rolling eyes and his ineffectual struggle to speak, with a fascination that had no sympathy in it: the dread of the moment for his own fate had stunned all feeling of altruism.

We can know compassion only when we are *not* afflicted by fear.

To this someone might reply that if compassion is not fear it is anxiety, a distinction of degree but not of kind. Fear we feel at present dangers, anxiety—alias compassion—at those lurking ones to which the misfortunes of others recall us. This interpretation too, however, fails the one relevant test. We all have felt anxiety for ourselves, and we all have felt sorry for another. We have no difficulty knowing which of these we feel, or otherwise distinguishing between them. The experience of one is not that of the other—although both sometimes vie within us. And, like fear, much anxiety diminishes compassion. Our concern for our fellow retires before our self-concern.

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It is the supposition that compassion is at bottom anxiety which appears to underlie a famous maxim of Rousseau's: "One pities in others only those ills from which one does not feel oneself exempt" (*Emile*, Book Four). Like much of Rousseau's analysis of compassion, this is arresting without being wholly persuasive. Consider the following counterexample. During the dreadful plague of Athens in 431 B.C., few who were stricken recovered, but those who did gained immunity. "For this disease," as Thucydides reports, "never took any man the second time, so as to be mortal. And [those who had recovered] were both by others accounted happy; and they also themselves, through excess of present joy, conceived a kind of light hope never to die of any other sickness hereafter." Yet Thucydides offers this in explanation not of why such men did not pity the sick, but of why it was chiefly they who did, "as having both known the misery themselves, and now no more subject to the danger." In circumstances so extreme, only immunity could free the Athenians from that excess of fear which, more surely than safety, is death to compassion. And recollection of past evils sufficed in place of apprehension of future ones as a basis for commiseration with present victims.

If Rousseau's maxim is at least half true, it is not because compassion for others is at bottom worry about ourselves. (In that case it would be wholly true.) It is rather that evils that we anticipate join ones that we remember in striking a particularly sonorous chord within us. This makes perfect sense, without in any way compelling the conclusion that compassion is something other than compassion.

Lastly, compassion is not putting ourselves in the place of the sufferer. In feeling it we imagine neither that we are he nor that his troubles are befalling us. We are as conscious as we can be that we are *not* in his shoes. *He* is the sufferer, not us. Compassion both preserves and presupposes this distinction.

The very reflection that "There but for the grace of God go I" implies first of all that just now I don't. It also confirms my awareness that some day I may, and that if so it would not be pleasant for me. In this sense we do indeed frequently put ourselves in someone else's place. This may facilitate compassion by bringing his plight home to us. It does not, however, constitute compassion, nor will it suffice to account for it. Instead we must presuppose compassion in order to explain how reflections of this sort elicit it. To put ourselves in the place of our neighbor is an act of reason or imagination, which compassion is not. (It is a sentiment.) Nor would any such train of thought lead us to compassion, were we not a kind of beings who feel it. If we were in truth naturally concerned with ourselves alone, our insight into our exposedness to the ills suffered by our fellow might arouse our anxiety, along with a measure of relief (that this time around it is he, not me). It would not inspire con-

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cern for him. In fact it fosters some anxiety, some relief, *and* some compassion. We're no angels. Neither, however, are many of us quite devoid of fellow-feeling.

Unlike so many things, compassion is what it seems to be. We do feel for one another; that expression is not misleading. When my heart sinks at the troubles of a friend, ones which I may have long since surmounted or which I may in no sense anticipate, why must I doubt that it is in his pain that I take pain? And when what I feel for him is quite distinct from all those passions that I am used to feeling on my own behalf, why should I think that it is reducible to them? Other sentiments may lurk about compassion, may color it, narrow it, even overwhelm it. But they aren't it. Try to take compassion apart, and you will not easily get it back together again.

V

If there is so much wrong with attempts to reduce compassion to disguised self-concern, why has there been such a throng of them? In part because they gratify that "hidden desire to belittle" (Nietzsche) so typical of scientific psychology. There is something brittle about that "realism" which determines to explain away the last glimmer of genuine concern for others. Armed with an egoistic psychology which he assumes in order to prove, our realist fearlessly unveils the hidden movements of the human heart. Likely as not he finishes by impoverishing them, for fear of having to abandon egoism. At this point intervenes, by way of reaction, the best known alternative to "realism": "idealism." Cynicism vies with unreasonable hopes; between them these have shaped the restless soul of the modern intellectual. They also define the spectrum of current attitudes toward compassion.

There is a second reason for the lasting appeal of a debunking approach to compassion. It is that clearly there is something to it. Compassion may not be disguised self-concern, but, as we have seen, it is usually accompanied by various other feelings which are, and which may well overpower it. Who would certify that of all the painful emotions which afflict us at the sight of another's suffering, pure commiseration is always uppermost? What is certain is that where these other passions compete rather than conspire with compassion, compassion has trouble making headway against them. This is what lends credence to the Hobbesian view that sympathy is merely self-concern on vacation.

Take, for example, our incident drawn from the memoir of the convict. It confirmed the distinction between compassion and fear for oneself arising from contemplation of the misery of others. It also suggested, however, how rudely such fear suppresses compassion.

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First things first. When we are moved on our own behalf—be it by pain, fear, or anger; greed, desire, revenge, or toothache—there is rarely enough of us left over to enter into the feelings of others. "Limousine liberalism" is typical of people who profess compassion, not because they are hypocrites, but because it is typical of compassion itself. The hypocrisy lies in castigating those whose more exposed situation provides less shelter for their compassion. Tender sensibilities, like other fine things, are mostly for those who can afford them.

So much for external restraints on compassion, arising from the fact that it does not have the soul to itself. Even where it encounters no rival, however, its vision very often fails it. This happens because what the heart thinks it knows, it takes imagination's word for.

That compassion depends on imagination is obvious. It is true that when the sufferer stands before us, the incarnate expression of his suffering, the mind need not tell us what the eye can see. Most of the time, however, it is the other way around: having learned of the misfortune, we infer the fact of the misery. And should we happen first upon the grief, knowledge of its causes will deepen our commiseration—except where, these seeming trivial, it will diminish it. Either case equally confirms that our participation in the pain depends mostly on our estimate of the affliction. And that is the task of imagination.

Compassion's dependence on imagination is especially crucial in the public realm. For suffering to evoke a public response, the troubles of some must be published to all. They must be publicized—presented to the imagination of the public. The success of such an appeal is therefore subject to the limitations of imagination.

These considerations will explain, I think, why compassion enjoyed so little credit among the thinkers of the pre-Christian West who took up the problem of the just society. To the philosophers of Greece and Rome, compassion was no virtue. Aristotle, for example, does not consider pity in his *Ethics*, his account of those traits for which people are and ought to be admired. Instead, as we have seen, he treats it in the *Rhetoric*, as one of those emotions by which they are swayed.

If we regret the weakness of compassion, that is because we do not doubt its justice. The ancients were wary of such power as it had because they strongly questioned its justice. According to the *Rhetoric* our sympathies do not lend themselves impartially, in strict proportion to the depth and undeservedness of the misfortune. Instead they seek out those who resemble us or whose sufferings resemble ours, past, present, or anticipated. The sickly pity the sick, Greeks other Greeks, old men the old, debtors other debtors. That someone is sick, however, or a Greek, or old, or a debtor, says nothing for the justice of his cause.

This sympathy of like for like is neither surprising nor squalid. (It cer-

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tainly does not demand the conclusion that compassion is at the bottom disguised self-concern.) Obviously our perception of our neighbor's experience is highly colored by our own. Imagination is idiosyncratic, shaped by our own past and dominated by our own present. It therefore bestows its favors by rules which must seem egocentric. The evils to which it responds are principally those we know or fear for ourselves—not because pity is in the end self-pity, but because the more thoroughly we grasp some evil, the more deeply we sympathize with its victims. Still, that is enough to make for tension between our compassion and our justice.

Compassion first comes to sight as a great respecter of justice; as Aristotle stresses, we pity those who suffer undeservedly, not those who have their troubles coming to them. There is, however, some discrepancy between the erstwhile justice of compassion and its proclivity for sufferers and sufferings reminiscent of ourselves and our own. Indeed this last fact points to a weakness which compassion shares with the rest of our passions. Why is it that we cannot be trusted to serve as judges in our own case? Not because we consciously prefer the promptings of passion to those of equity. It is simply that we are so skilled at persuading ourselves that the two coincide. Consider, in this connection, the most explosive of human feelings, anger. It is usually a reflex to our failure to have things our way. As such it is only incidentally just. But try to persuade the angry of that. No sentiment is accompanied by so burning a sense of its own righteousness. Compassion is almost as sure of itself.

Compassion, like our other passions, tends less toward equity than toward insisting that equity is with it. For the same reason that the Greeks tended to sympathize with one another over and against barbarians, they tended to exaggerate whatever harm (and the injustice of whatever harm) barbarians did to them. Through compassion we take upon ourselves the most intense concerns of the sufferer, with all the intransigence that this implies toward whatever stands in the way of these. We get to feeling sorry for others, moreover, for the same reasons that we would for ourselves. If we react on their behalf as we would on our own when confronted with the same pain or provocation, the chances are good that we are overreacting. While disinterested in one sense (it is not in our own right that we get so upset), compassion is rarely so in any other. It does not correct for the partiality of our perspective on justice. It merely extends to a few other people the good offices of our egocentrism.

Aristotle, then, and the other ancient thinkers reject compassion as the basis of justice not because it is in the long run too weak a reed to support it. That is true, but beside the point. The point is that where compassion is powerful—and no orator can afford to ignore its power—justice is too often its victim. In this, commiseration does not differ from

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fear and anger, which is why Aristotle treats it along with them. Neither good nor bad in itself, it will be better or worse depending upon the moral education and character of the person who feels it. Like most passions it is a test of our justice.

This pre-Christian perspective on compassion is likely to strike us as crabbed and ungenerous. We have grown used to regarding commiseration as noble rather than neutral, as a provider of moral guidance rather than as something in need of it. That the compassion we feel is justified is something that we take for granted. Most people always have. This does not refute, but confirms, how relative compassion is to our particular perspective on life. This perspective will at the same time focus sympathy and narrow it.

As various as are people's natures and fortunes, so various will be the contours of compassion. Politically, compassion, in conducing to rage, conduces also to wars. And not just to wars on poverty. Our century has hardly seen a demagogue, however bloody and monstrous his designs, who has not known how to rally compassion and mine its potential for sympathetic moral indignation. The resentful, after all, are liberal with their commiseration for what they take to be indignities resembling their own. Those poor Sudeten Germans, for example. . . . Compassion is everywhere, which includes places where we would rather not find it.

We have now come face-to-face with what is most fateful about compassion. That is precisely its power to generate sympathetic indignation.

Rage is the mightiest and most dangerous of the elemental forces of politics. Compassion, then, is not. Pity, however, is but a step from rage, and, in the revolutions of modernity, has proved to be the great step to it. For everyone knows who has led these upheavals: not men of the people, but men of popular sympathies—men the best of whom have been "haunted and driven" by compassion.

Sympathetic wrath defines the last full measure of sympathy; to step back from it is to step back from one's compassion. For this reason as well as for others, anger is the token of sympathy that every outraged sufferer most craves. The oppressed and resentful know the truth that he who is not with them is against them. There can be no being-with in politics which does not include a being-against. Being-with is siding with, and no solidarity worth the name stops short of being solidarity against. Miss Arendt has sketched this dynamic with reference to the French example. Historians will debate what the cause of the Parisian multitude required. However, there was no doubt—as there has been none in Iran—about what the people themselves were demanding. " *'Par pitié, par amour pour l'humanité, soyez inhumains!'*—these words, taken almost at random from a petition of one of the sections of the Parisian Commune to the National Convention, are neither accidental nor ex-

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treme; they are the authentic language of pity." (Arendt) Or, at any rate, of an appeal to which pity has proved responsive.

Joseph Conrad has brilliantly portrayed this affinity of pure compassion for pure rage. Stevie, in *The Secret Agent* (1908), is the half-witted stepson of Mr. Verloc, the seedy agent provocateur of the title. Stevie's idiocy takes the form of a raw sensitivity to all ills within his comprehension, unmediated by reflection and the awareness that it brings of the complexity of things. Cruelty to animals throws him into a frenzy. During a brief employment as an office boy, his mates ply him with tales of oppression, to the end of getting him to touch off fireworks on the staircase. After that his mother keeps him at home. Verloc, however, under pressure from his Continental employers to concoct some anarchist happening suited to alarming the English public, hits upon Stevie as the perfect carrier of a bomb intended for the Greenwich Observatory. Stevie trips, and when the truth comes out, Winnie Verloc murders her husband.

Rather like Billy Budd, whom Miss Arendt adduces in her discussion of the violent character of "natural goodness," Stevie represents an impossible limit case of moral innocence. Such innocence, by an inner necessity, expresses itself as compassion and as rage.

> A magnanimous indignation swelled his frail chest to bursting, and caused his candid eyes to squint. Supremely wise in knowing his own powerlessness, Stevie was not wise enough to restrain his passions. The tenderness of his universal charity had two phases as indissolubly joined and connected as the reverse and obverse sides of a medal. The anguish of immoderate compassion was succeeded by the pain of an innocent but pitiless rage.

Such rage is pitiless—that is, boundless—*because* it is innocent. Not all political terrorists act from it, only the "best" ones. It is in their hands that "pity, taken as the spring of virtue, has proved to possess a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself." (Arendt) By itself pity is both too little and too much.

VI

Compassion's natural affinity for likeness is not, of course, to be taken too literally. The points of resemblance need not be obvious. They need not even exist except in the mind of the beholder. It is the task of the pleader to find—or to forge—the likeness uniting us with his clients. Just as certain kindhearted people read human feelings into beasts, and misinterpret their moods accordingly, so we may ascribe our sensibilities to human beings who do not share them. (Tradesmen often commiserate with my wife when she tells them I am an intellectual.) This has consequences for our compassion, since, as Rousseau insists, "the pity one

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has for another's misfortune is measured not by the quantity of that misfortune but by the sentiment which one attributes to those who suffer it." As our estimation of the victim's sensitivity varies, so too will the depth of our compassion. For this reason, Rousseau continues, we become "hardened against the fate of men, and the rich are consoled about the ill they do to the poor, because they assume the latter to be stupid enough to feel nothing of it."

Compassion is usually widest of the mark when confronted with people astonishingly, in effect unimaginably, different from ourselves. Here imagination commonly takes one of two equally unreasonable courses. Either it minimizes the exotic's feelings, or it assimilates them to our own. Thus the two sides of Anglo-Saxon imperialism: callous and naively sentimental.

Still and all, we commiserate most naturally with people most obviously like ourselves and liable to like misfortunes. This has important consequences, not only for the justice of compassion, but for its behavior under differing political conditions. It means that its role will be most general in democratic societies like our own.

Tocqueville may have been the first to remark how easily compassion came to the citizens of modern democracies. He observed that Americans responded to the predicaments even of strangers with a warmth and genuineness not to be found among the French. The relative homogeneity of America, he concluded, worked to render sympathy both ready and extensive, whereas aristocracy had mostly immured it within the iron confines of class.

> When the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, who all belonged to the aristocracy by birth or education, relate the tragic end of a noble, their grief flows apace; whereas they tell you at a breath and without wincing of massacres and tortures inflicted on the common sort of people. Not that these writers felt habitual hatred or systematic disdain for the people; war between the several classes of the community was not yet declared. They were impelled by an instinct rather than by a passion; as they had formed no clear notion of a poor man's sufferings, they cared but little for his fate.

This insensibility was mutual; neither did the lower orders display any human sympathies for the higher. The bonds between the classes were otherwise forged. In democracy, matters are very different.

> When all the ranks of a community are nearly equal, as men think and feel in nearly the same manner, each of them may judge in a moment of the sensations of all the others; he casts a rapid glance upon himself, and that is enough. There is no wretchedness into which he cannot readily enter, and a secret instinct reveals to him its extent. It signifies not that strangers or foes are the sufferers; imagination puts him in their place; something like a personal feeling is

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mingled with his pity and makes himself suffer while the body of his fellow creature is in torture.

In democratic ages men rarely sacrifice themselves for one another, but they display general compassion for the members of the human race. They inflict no useless ills, and they are happy to relieve the griefs of others when they can do so without much hurting themselves; they are not disinterested, but they are humane.

If democracy is milder than aristocracy, that is not because sensibilities are broader here, but because the spectrum of human types is narrower. Our rich really are like the rest of us; nothing thrills them like owning a ball club.

If, then, according to Tocqueville's analysis, those in aristocracy exaggerate the differences among human beings, their democratic counterparts are prone to the opposite error. Aristocratic man is too slow, democratic man too quick to assimilate the feelings of another to his own. Important similarities will escape the one, and relevant differences the other. What Tocqueville identifies as the cardinal error of democratic historians—the interpretation of all past events as having happened the way they would have happened in a democracy—proves to be characteristic of the democratic understanding as such.

The America that Tocqueville saw was in some respects more homogeneous than it was to become. Democracy is still democracy, however, and Tocqueville's analysis is still sound. We remain more persuaded of the similarities among us, and between us and other nations, than attuned to the differences; we remain a broadly compassionate people in part because we are not a very sensitive one.

VII

Imagination's partiality to likeness is not the only thing about it which works to limit the justice of compassion. So does the very fact that what it supplies us with are images.

Images of suffering tend to be disproportionate to their occasions. This is true even in the absence of the obstacles mentioned previously. And it is truest where suffering is most widespread and massive; truest, then, where horrors most cry out for public notice. It is not from terror and exhaustion only that imagination falters before the horrors of our century. It is not only from surfeit; it is also from want of an entrée. As the greatest crimes by their very magnitude elude proportionate indignation, so vast misery defies commiseration. Stalin was right: a million dead are a statistic. All pathos lies in particulars. If compassion is to fathom a Holocaust, a Gulag, it must first breach the mute opacity of everything countless.

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Our sympathies thrive on representative sufferings, on the scale of one individual or family. The televised *Holocaust*, someone observed, portrayed that event as a good way to meet girls. That was understandable. Such concreteness, however, while helpful for arousing human interest, is in its own way abstract. The representative of whatever sort is always an abstraction from the represented, and for the very reason that imagination fastens on the one, it cannot accomplish the leap to the other. We cannot respond to representative suffering with the manifold intensity due it as a representative. The anguish which mills about offstage can hardly be anything more for us than an echo of that confronting us directly, a murmur subsiding with every refrain.

Compassion, as Kant once complained, has "no proportion in it." "A suffering child will fill our heart with sadness, while at the same time we hear with indifference the news of a terrible battle." Compassion responds keenly enough to particular sufferings within its ken. What lies beyond, it divines only dimly, as a swimmer does the vastness of the oceans. Like him it finds itself wholly immersed in the few drops of sorrow that are nearest to hand.

One hears much today against the selectivity of liberal compassion, how it makes a great deal of certain sufferings while ignoring equal or greater ones. Walter Kaufmann, for instance, in a piece on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* called precisely "Selective Compassion," has enumerated many such inconsistencies from the history of the past three decades. The charge is all too often warranted, especially when the real issue is the hypocrisy of an ideological double standard. (As with the recent refusals, by such as Jane Fonda and William Kunstler, to call a spade a spade when the gravedigger is "a socialist country.") On the whole, liberals still tend to overexcuse oppression exercised by the Left, as if it were in fact inflicted in a doleful spirit of historical necessity, and as if this "necessity" ever bore sweet fruit.

Even where ideology is not an issue, we face no shortage of ersatz compassion. It is a cardinal hypocrisy of our time, just because compassion is a cardinal virtue. "Selectivity," however, is insufficient evidence on which to convict it. The most genuine compassion will likely wear blinders, simply because imagination does.

The intrinsic partiality of compassion does also, however, foster hypocrisy in the usual sense. This it does by deepening the gulf between compassion as sentiment and what we might call compassion as principle. This last, often going by the name "humanity," presents itself as a principled solidarity with suffering and a determination to eradicate it. Oddly, this project, while it would appear the apotheosis of compassion, cannot rally the living, breathing sentiment.

"Humanity" is beneficence stretched beyond the range of benevo-

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lence. We search in vain for a spontaneous feeling that is willing and able to sustain it. Today compassion, like everything else, must submit to bureaucratization. Its very irrationality stimulates efforts to rationalize it. Its unreliability, the fitfulness—almost randomness—of its attentions, its scattershot approach to problems which cry out for comprehensive remedies—in practice, the failure of private philanthropy to banish misery from America—all this seems to call for the institutionalization of our better selves. For these same reasons, however, compassion defies proclamation as a principle. "Humanity" is impartial and general: compassion turned Hegelian civil servant. Compassion itself remains capricious, willful, and not to be summoned at will. Little things kill it—his grating voice, my sour stomach—also big ones. At their best, our agencies of caring gloss what Max Weber meant by the "routinization of charisma." They promise what nothing human can deliver: compassion on demand.

Compassion resembles love: to demand it is a good way to kill it. This is no less true when the one of whom I demand it is myself. The people that La Rochefoucauld knew may have been less well-meaning than ourselves. Among us, at least where compassion is concerned, hypocrisy may be nothing worse than the homage that good intentions pay to virtue.

Related to this discrepancy between compassion as sentiment and compassion as principle is the phenomenon of liberal guilt. Guilt increasingly dominates liberalism, one of several reasons why liberalism does not increasingly dominate the country. (The people liked *The Deer Hunter*, while liberals may be expected to prefer *Apocalypse Now*.) Sometimes this guilt understands itself as penance for past insensitivity, and as issuing in compensatory compassion. Perhaps it does so issue, sometimes, but there are reasons for doubt.

American liberals were most compassionate when they were most magnanimous, before they began to be troubled with themselves. Al Smith (the "Happy Warrior"), FDR, and Frances Perkins exemplified in their different ways the grand and warm style of our liberalism. So did Hubert Humphrey, despite reverses which tried his ebullience. Today's liberalism is a kettle of colder fish.

Dogmatic rather than confident, neoliberalism is less convinced that it is right than that its predecessor was wrong. (Hence its much greater openness to castigation from the Left.) Its quarrel is as much with familiar liberalism as with the familiar enemies of liberalism. The former it deprecates as superficial—paternalistic, content with half measures, ignorant that we labor under curses which only sincere repentance can expunge. Expiation—achieved through policies of compensation—is the name of the game for current liberalism. Guilt is warranted, and where

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none is manifest—toward minorities, toward women, toward the Third World—there must be a strong presumption of illiberalism.

Whatever link between them liberals may profess, guilt is something very different from compassion. No one would confuse a guilty glance with a compassionate one. The guilt-stricken man may well seek to benefit those whom he holds himself to have wronged. He may go even farther down that road than were he merely compassionate. Guilt is a sharper goad than compassion. It is not, however, very friendly to it.

Compassion looks outward, guilt inward. To commiserate with someone is quite distinct from blaming oneself for having caused his misery. In the first case the sufferer remains the focus; in the second the focus has shifted inward. Guilt is more egocentric than compassion. Its tendency is at least as much to narrow our sympathies as to enlarge them. It casts life as a drama of which its expiation is the center. All else is incidental, significant only within this context. Atonement is a full-time job. This is one reason why some sufferings are more fashionable than others.

It is not, however, merely that guilt closes us to sufferings other than those that we have caused. It is also that it hardens us to the evils that we inflict in purging it. We tend to ignore the third-party costs of the righting of our favorite wrongs. No one committed to racial quotas can afford to feel too sorry for the Brian Webers of the world.

Lastly, the division of the world into the guilty and their victims limits the scope of compassion. Our sympathies cannot help distinguishing between just sufferings and unjust ones. In this respect, at least, we are all "compassionate but tough." Nor is there any way of removing the sting from this distinction. Popular liberal "environmentalism" (as in "we are all products of our environment") may blame the criminal on society, but society it always blames on itself. Rather than abolish culpability, it shifts it from the offender to that and those against whom he offends. Politically speaking, there is no such thing as a consistent determinism. The buck stops somewhere. It is current for liberals to assert that it stops with well-to-do white America, thereby dealing themselves in. "Crime is the price we pay for decades of injustice and neglect."

Bad conscience, especially class bad conscience, effects a strange inversion of compassion. No longer will we be most sensitive to the misfortunes of people most like ourselves. Instead we will perceive these as deserved, at least where they have not been preceded by repentance. And sufferings that befall the unjust, especially at the hands of their victims, are not occasions for commiseration. As the Thebans put it in Thucydides, in pleading successfully with the Spartans to slaughter some inveterate enemies of Thebes, "Pity belongeth to such as suffer undeservedly; but, on the contrary, when men are worthily punished, as these are,

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it is to be rejoiced at." As members in good standing of society which has the criminal on its conscience, some of the victims of crime would seem to have it coming to them. At their fate, liberals may feel a twinge of satisfaction contending with regret and fear. They might find themselves in sympathy with the putative victim-turned-victimizer. They will surely be out of sympathy with "society's" indignation against him. Today's American liberals are, as the European ones of the thirties were, remarkably weak defenders of liberal society.

And if we ourselves should be victimized? Here we are more prone to outrage, nature having strongly inclined us to take our own side in matters of life, limb, property, and dear ones. Consider, however, the reaction of the Hearsts to the kidnapping of their daughter. They needed only this punishment in order to be persuaded of their crime; in no time they were leaving nothing unsaid against themselves and "society." Nor was this behavior of theirs unique. We can hardly be thought to take our transgressions seriously if we do not even crave chastisement for them. Such is the secret (and not so secret) longing of many an "anguished liberal." Much of what passes for compassion today is ultimately the pendant of liberal guilt. It is an expression less of openness to others than of revulsion from ourselves and our kind—or, at any rate, of a desire to revile our kind.

VIII

There can be little quarrel with the view that compassion makes the world a better place. Nor can we doubt that America is urgently in need of it just now. We have always been individualists (and usually rather rugged ones) in need of some check on individualism to serve as the basis of a common life. Tocqueville could view compassion as ancillary to the main founts of American morality: Protestant Christianity and the pursuit of self-interest rightly understood. Today, however, these old wells run dry, and dreams of replenishing them seem idle. The new sects which beset us, from born-again Christianity to the many hues of Californianity, join only in demanding as little of the heart as of the mind. In these circumstances, compassion is something around which decent instincts can rally. That, unfortunately, will not enable it to carry the day. Only rarely, as we have seen, does compassion transcend rather narrow limits, beyond which it is usually weak and within which it is not always just. Compassion does not broaden our perspective on the world; rather it is subject to all its limitations. We may cherish it for the good that it does and because, as Socrates is reported to have said, it is one of the things that suggest that nature intended human beings to be friends. Like most precious things, it is not in the end very powerful.

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In Despair He Orders a New Typewriter

ELDER OLSON

I want a typewriter
Without any letters
Just punctuation marks
Letters make words
Words make language
There's too much language
Too little punctuation
It all runs together
There's no content anyway
When every advertisement
Annuls another
Every politician's speech is
A try and see what you make of it
Rorschach inkblot

Cut down on the question marks
My mind nowadays
Is so full of question marks
They could make enough coat hooks
For the congressional cloakroom
But let's have some numbers
We can number all clichés
All platitudes all promises
I yearn for a future
When all advertisements
All political rhetoric

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Will be nothing but numbers
And pornographic novels
Nothing but asterisks
And convulsive commas

Or for at least a return
To those simpler days
When it went without saying
That an enemy could be
Hazardous to your health
When enemies meeting
Used punctuation only
Could exclaim merely
By the definite emphasis
Of war club or battle-ax
And with dagger or spearpoint
Put an absolutely final
Unmisquotable
Unmistakable period.

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Even Though

A = pi r squared

even if a body
continues to fall
32 feet per second per second

which I hope

it will continue to do
nevertheless
after careful calculation

and by the grace of algebra

I am persuaded that
if truth is a number
not only is it never

in the back of the book

but it never comes out even
ends in a fraction
cannot be rounded off.

Approximation
was the first art.
It is the only science.

JOHN STONE

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Who Killed Criticism?

GERALD GRAFF

WHEN I WAS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL in the late fifties, "criticism" was still a fighting word. It was still, though only faintly, a party slogan in the combat between "critics" and "scholars" which for several decades had polarized the literature departments of universities. Critical survivors told stories of their persecution. Yvor Winters, who became an instructor in English at Stanford in 1928, wrote of being warned by one of his department heads that

> criticism and scholarship do not mix, that if I wanted to become a serious scholar I should give up criticism. He told me likewise that poetry and scholarship do not mix. . . . And he added that my publications were a disgrace to the department. Fortunately for myself, he was the only one of [my] four department heads to hold these views, but one was almost enough. And he was far from the exception so far as the profession as a whole was concerned. There were other men like him at Stanford, some in positions of greater power; and there were others like him elsewhere. At least two of the critics whom I have mentioned in connection with myself have had comparable experiences, and I have heard respectable scholars tell stories of boorish rudeness to or concerning one or two of these men, have heard them tell the stories as if the incidents were triumphs of the intellect or of humor or both.

Writing the above in 1957, Winters added that "I and my critical associates are still something very like bohemians in the eyes of many of our colleagues."

I doubt that anybody will argue that the situation described by Winters still exists. Perhaps the warfare between scholars and critics has lately been revived with a new alignment of combatants: scholars and critics on the same side against deconstructers, as the American and French critics influenced by structuralism are called. Whatever the case, the literature departments long ago made their peace with criticism as such, both as a pedagogical method and as a mode of professional publication. And scholars and critics came to borrow so much from one another's methods that it has become difficult to distinguish between the two. Today, the words "scholarship" and "criticism" are used interchangeably, or are absorbed into the catchall term "literary study." We

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no longer think of the critic as concerned only with the close reading of the text itself, divorced from knowledge of the historical situation of the text; nor do we think of the scholar as primarily an accumulator of facts, one who rarely applies his learning to interpretation.

This cessation of hostilities is an event few can regret; and few can wish to reverse the triumph of criticism over an opposition in large degree anti-intellectual and reactionary. Yet because this triumph has occurred so swiftly, we easily forget how recently criticism was despised and resisted in the university. We also forget that criticism, before its acceptance into the university, was practiced under very different conditions—conditions which may have been more advantageous to the critical spirit.

Before its assimilation by the university, criticism was mainly the business of literary journalists or, in the higher toned phrase, men of letters. As criticism became academicized, the independent literary journalist disappeared—often by becoming a professor of literature. Economics has played an important part in this transition. In 1899, Walter Besant wrote that "the modern man of letters—not a great genius, not a popular author: but a good steady man of letters of the kind which formerly had to inhabit the garrets of Grub Street . . . makes an income by his labor which enables him to live in comfort, and to educate his children properly." But as John Gross points out in *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* (in which I found the quotation from Besant), the profession of letters was no longer economically secure after World War I. (Gross describes the English situation, but for our purposes we may overlook its differences from the American scene.) With the exception of Gross's excellent book, to my knowledge little has been written about how absorption by the university has affected literary criticism. Since most professors have a keen interest in academic politics, one might expect them to be more curious about the way institutional pressures have influenced critical trends, yet these pressures actually discourage such inquiries. Gene Lyons has recently noted (in *TriQuarterly* 43) that academic "creative writing" has become "a specialty and, as such, is in a fair way to developing a kind of world view to protect itself from hostile scrutiny by outsiders." To me this is also what has happened in criticism.

One function of the literary journalist had been to educate a broad, general public about contemporary literature. When university literature departments consisted chiefly of scholars in the old sense, current literature was left, often with undisguised condescension or contempt, to the journalists. The modern novel in particular, which is to say the naturalistic novel, was regarded by many professors as immoral, pessimistic, decadent—at any rate not worth serious study. In his *Autobiography* William Lyon Phelps tells of inaugurating a course in the modern novel

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at Yale in 1895 which included *Jude the Obscure, Trilby, Pudd'nhead Wilson,* and *Almayer's Folly.* He believed this was "the first course in any university in the world confined wholly to contemporary fiction," and the event was remarkable enough to occasion editorials in both the United States and England. When Phelps published a volume *On Modern Novelists* in 1910, reviewers, he says, "were amazed that a book of essays on contemporary writers should come from a university professor." Most significantly, Phelps recalls that the majority of the older professors threatened to dismiss him unless he dropped the course at the end of the year.

Such a threat seems inconceivable today, despite occasional local censorship of school texts. The advent of criticism in the university coincided with the entry into the curriculum, in unprecedented proportions, of the classics of modern and contemporary literature. To put it more precisely, the adoption of modern and contemporary works as classroom texts did much—just *how* much is open to debate—to confer classic status on these works. Some sociologist of literature might usefully analyze the shift in college (and secondary school) enrollments that eventually brought more students into courses in twentieth-century literature than in all earlier periods combined. The 1934–35 catalogue of Northwestern University, for example, listed eleven courses in literature and language (exclusive of composition) "for advanced undergraduates and graduates," and only four of these dealt with writers as recent as the nineteenth century. Nobody later than Arnold, Tennyson, and Whitman seems to have been read at all. Penciled enrollment figures in my copy indicate that of 360 students taking these courses, some 280 probably read no literature published after 1850. In 1974–75, to take a recent year at random, students at the same level were offered 63 courses, 18 of them in the literature of the twentieth century. These 18 courses enrolled some 783 students, as compared to the total of 789 enrolled in all courses in earlier periods. The figures will surprise nobody, yet one wonders why so remarkable a shift has not provoked more reflection.

It seems no accident that the curriculum's increasing emphasis on the contemporary should have coincided with the growth and establishment of criticism within the university. The New Criticism, whose name quickly became synonymous with the critical movement as a whole, was propelled by a zeal to promote modern, often experimental works whose complex structure required close textual analysis, especially if they were to be made accessible to the baffled general public. Critical interpretation of texts (or explication, as it came to be called) did not of course restrict itself to modern literature. But I wonder if the techniques of close reading could have achieved such dominance were it not for the emergence of a literature whose difficulty particularly called for them.

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Nor does the triumph of critical interpretation seem explainable apart from the expansion of the university into an institution of mass education—a process already under way by the 1890s. In that decade, well before criticism became the staple of the academic journals, there arose a movement to emphasize interpretation in the college classroom over philology, biography, history, appreciation, and ethical training. (The graduate classroom remained philological and historical.) Martin Wright Sampson, who became chairman of the English department at Indiana University in 1893, argued for "placing the student face to face with the work itself" and having him "interpret the work of art and ascertain what makes it just that and not something else." "The study of literature," wrote Sampson in 1894, "means the study of *literature*, not of biography nor of literary history (incidentally of vast importance), not of grammar, not of etymology, not of anything except the works themselves viewed as their creators wrote them, viewed as art, as transcripts of humanity,—not as logic, not as psychology, not as ethics." These remarks and others like them in the period (see, for example, A. C. Bradley's 1901 Oxford Lecture, "Poetry for Poetry's Sake") suggest that the New Criticism originated much earlier than is usually supposed. But although, according to Sampson, the goals he was articulating had already become "truisms among a certain class of teachers," they were "truisms of theory (not yet of practice)." The full implementation of a critical pedagogy had to wait for a later, more democratic university.

I cannot prove that the method of close reading in the classroom and the journals was directly connected with the democratization of the university. But it figures to have been no liability that this method made it unnecessary for the student of literature—or, for that matter, his instructor—to bring with him a large body of inherited information and culture. In other words, explication was a more "teachable" method precisely because it stripped the literary transaction down to the essentials and made a work potentially available to anybody possessing the rudiments of literacy. Most professors of literature will remember their relief, in their first years of teaching, when they discovered that by concentrating on its structure one can manage to teach a work without knowing anything about its author or about the period in which it was written. By the same token, it was surely no accident that in university (and secondary school) pedagogy the triumph of explication coincided with the replacement of the old lecture-and-recitation method by the discussion method of teaching. When R. S. Crane in 1935 called for emphasis on criticism over history in literary study, it must have seemed natural to advocate "fewer . . . lecture courses" as part of his program. The fortunes of literary criticism, literary modernism, and the democratic expansion of the university are closely linked.

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Out of the conjunction came a new kind of literary intellectual: the professor of modern literature. Armed on the one hand with a formidable "methodology" (the popularity of this word in the period is significant) and on the other with a powerful stock of theories about modern life, modern science, modern politics, and modern psychology, the professor of modern literature came into his own. Frequently he continued to produce literary journalism, but of a kind that reflected his peculiarly academic orientation. For all his anonymity outside the classroom, the professor of modern literature exerted an influence on his audience that in some ways was more absolute than the influence which had been exerted by the old literary journalist. This last statement may seem implausible, for a widely shared view has it that professors of literature have turned their backs on their potential public to search out pedantic or esoteric irrelevancies. And a closely related view has it that these professors have no potential public, that they are without power and influence. Both views are misleading—dangerously so insofar as they imply that academics need not worry lest what they say may have consequences in the public world. To be sure, the isolated conditions of professorial life do create an illusion that one's ideas have no consequences, a fact which may or may not explain certain adventures in unreality which characterize some current departments of critical opinion. But the growth of mass education, combined with the public's increased passivity and dependence on experts, has endowed professors generally with great influence over public taste and thought.

As the business of shaping popular taste passed to the professor, one aspect of this journalistic task of mediation did not survive the transition in good health. This was the transmission of critical standards, the training of readers and writers to be "critical." Admittedly the old-fashioned literary journalist was often little more than a press agent for the latest fashions. We can go back to the 1840s and a novel like Balzac's *Lost Illusions* for examples of that new type of uncritical critic, the panderer to literary fashion. Yet in certain ways the situation of the earlier literary journalist inhibited this capitulation to fashion: that journalist represented the interests of the lay public and not those of the literati alone. He represented the non-literary, or even the anti-literary, viewpoint—the viewpoint of the modestly educated person who might be curious about serious literature without being an aesthete or an aficionado. A fruitful tension was maintained between the journalistic critic and the lay reader, as the critic sought to overcome lay resistance to new forms of literature while at the same time harboring a bit of this resistance himself. If the journalist operated as literature's agent in the society of general readers, he was also that society's agent in the literary world.

When the journalist became a professor, he ceased to be a "double

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agent" in the sense I have just described. The academic critic combined the journalist's broad influence over his audience (now a student body rather than a reading public) with the scholar's indifference to this audience. Like his scholarly colleague, the academic critic did not need to be aware of the lay reader's point of view, except as something to be rooted out and transformed by instruction. In practice this meant overcoming the student's philistine resistance and preparing him to appreciate modernist literature and ideas.

These ideas are far too complicated for concise summary, but boiled down to a few formulas (as they necessarily were for classroom purposes), they include the following propositions: (1) that not only are traditional theories of man, nature, history, and society no longer valid, but most theories of any kind falsify human experience; (2) that human experience is therefore incomprehensible, but can nevertheless be "ordered" successfully by the literary imagination; (3) that though literature gives no objective knowledge, it provides us with "values"—provisional myths by which we may tentatively make sense of day-to-day existence; and (4) that modern society is a vast, impersonal, inhuman mechanism that we neither understand nor control, though we can achieve a kind of mastery over it through the imagination, which can ultimately humanize it. These formulas may be reductive, but who among professors of literature has not seen them reiterated ad nauseam in routine critical articles and examination blue books?

Since contempt for the lay point of view is a mark of most professionals, it would be surprising if the professional literary critic were an exception. But in the critic's case, this contempt was intensified by pressures that did not affect other professionals—pressures arising from the peculiarly politicized situation of high culture in America (and most Western countries), in which the "creative" life and the practical-commercial life have coexisted in a state of antagonism. Modern literary ideology equated the lay point of view with philistinism, crude utilitarianism, and the glorification of quantity over quality, matter over spirit, fact over value. Accurate though the equation might often have been, it gave the literary intellectual a good excuse for being self-righteous about his ideas and defensive toward outsiders. As if the professional's suspicion of the layman were not sufficient, it was much intensified by the literary man's distrust of the bourgeois.

The net effect of this combination of forces was to push the critic into a relation of partisanship with respect to literature. No longer sharing the layman's viewpoint even partially, the professor-critic became a promoter of "literature" as such, somewhat as the insurance man is a promoter of insurance as such or the transportation industries are promoters of travel as such. He became literature's agent in hostile or indif-

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ferent territory, though dedicated to making as many converts among the heathen as possible. Not only did he no longer voice society's demands on literature, but voicing these demands appeared a form of betrayal. In a climate of warfare, a too critical attitude toward literature—or at least contemporary literature—gave aid and comfort to the enemy. Modernist literary ideology said that literature in a mass society was a victim of oppression; therefore, to adopt anything but a solicitous stance toward literature was to engage in blaming the victim.

What was especially paradoxical was that at the very moment this protective attitude was overtaking academic criticism, new forces were lessening literature's need to be protected. As professionalism and modernism perfected their assaults against lay hostility, that hostility had begun to disappear—in part as a result of the assaults but also for other reasons. The organized professionals' attack on the lay viewpoint was occurring at a moment when the layman's confidence in his viewpoint had already been eroded. Lionel Trilling, in his justly well-known essay "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," describes the odd sensation that comes over (or ought to come over) the professor of modern literature when it dawns on him what his assignment is. Insofar as he remains faithful to the spirit of the literature he is teaching, he must inculcate alienation and estrange his students from every assumption they may have inherited from their cultural past. Trilling goes on to describe the even odder sensation that comes when the professor realizes that his mission is not meeting the expected resistance—that the inheritance of which the students are supposed to be disabused has not been inherited at all, or is not considered worth holding onto. "I asked them to look into the Abyss," Trilling writes, "and, both dutifully and gladly, they have looked into the Abyss, and the Abyss has greeted them with the grave courtesy of all objects of serious study, saying: 'Interesting am I not? And *exciting*, if you consider how deep I am and what dread beasts lie at my bottom. Have it well in mind that a knowledge of me contributes materially to your being whole, or well-rounded, men.' "

Trilling's satire points up the incongruous ease with which a purportedly subversive modernism has been absorbed into the routine of midterms and majors. This domestication of the "adversary culture," which Trilling and others have analyzed, has become so much a commonplace of recent cultural criticism that one might expect designers of literature curricula to take some account of it. However, because of the peculiar fashion in which the literature curriculum is determined, it not only fails to adapt to this cultural development but actually obscures its occurrence. Since that curriculum is based on no principle, save possibly the attempt to "cover" a certain number of independent units, the philosophical contradictions it embodies need never obtrude on anybody's no-

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tice. Samuel Johnson and Antonin Artaud coexist peacefully in the catalogue; their separate but equal status as subjects of different courses prevents the incongruity from commanding attention. The curriculum's democratic amiability toward each citizen of the literary republic makes specific questions of ideology irrelevant, and no ideology is too shocking for inclusion. When a new subject wins admittance—science fiction, semiotics, women's studies—it is simply added to the existing aggregate, and this procedure makes it unnecessary for anybody to think about interrelations and conflicts within the whole. "Interdisciplinary" programs have mitigated the segregation of units, but since they are rarely informed by a coherent principle of integration, they too tend to become yet another item in a discrete series, rather than the disciplined examination of conflicting ideologies that would enable students (and professors) to make sense of the intellectual landscape.

As academic criticism and modern literature entered the university, the old opposition between "academic" and "avant-garde" lost its meaning. In the literature department, genteel cultivation of tradition gave way to an emphasis on novelty and keeping up to date. This emphasis on novelty had already been anticipated by the older scholars, despite their allegiance to the manners of a genteel social elite. The professionalizing of literary studies in the 1880s and 1890s had stemmed less from Matthew Arnold's ideals of cultural preservation than from the new quest to emulate the sciences by making breakthroughs on the frontiers of knowledge. What the insurgent critics regarded as traditional scholarship (as we still do today) was *anti*-traditional in the eyes of real Arnoldians like Irving Babbitt, who, in *Literature and the American College* (1908) and other books, bitterly attacked the scholars for their obsession with facts and novel discoveries. But in this respect Babbitt and his New Humanists were fighting a rearguard action. And when the critics were finally admitted to the faculty, their enthusiasm for "making it new" both in literary technique and critical methodology had long been prepared for by the older scholars' commitment to an ideal of continuous revision.

The university had imperceptibly but decisively changed sides in the cultural warfare over the modern movement, although the New Critical avant-garde obscured this shift in allegiance for a time through its advancement of professedly traditionalist ideas of literature. Even today the shift remains unnoticed because vanguard artists and critics within the university still pretend that the academy is against them, when in truth they are among its idols. Once a genteel bulwark against the immorality and pessimism of modern literature, the university became the principal apologist and explainer of literary modernism.

But this point requires some qualification. The university did not so much change sides in the cultural warfare over the modern movement as

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cease to take any definite side at all. Through the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, the teaching of literature had rested on a tacit understanding about the relations between literature and society. It was assumed, in ways that hardly needed to be spelled out, that literature supported the dominant values of the community, that literary training, like religious training, was what Albert S. Cook of the Yale English department in 1894 called "a most effective instrument of spiritual discipline." As modern literature assumed an increasing degree of importance in the curriculum, this claim either seemed hypocritical or took on an entirely different meaning. It was difficult to ascribe an uplifting social function to a body of work which, as Trilling noted, had declared war on society. And anyway, as professionalism eroded the older moralistic views of literature, fewer professors saw any value in ascribing uplift to literature. (The appearance of the word "uplift" in the twenties was itself a symptom of how far moral and philosophical traditions had deteriorated.) On the other hand, only to a limited and localized extent did the organized teaching of literature cohere around the new idea of an adversary culture. The official belief in the positive socializing function of literature gave way not to a new official belief in the subversive function of literature, but to no clearly discernible official belief at all concerning the social function of literature. As this function became more problematic, the question was no doubt easier avoided than confronted. And again, the additive nature of curriculum change made avoiding it an easy matter. Instead of confronting the challenge to cultural traditions posed by modern literature, and attempting to assimilate the confrontation somehow into the structure of the literature program, literature departments preferred to engraft more courses and sequences onto the existing aggregate. As a result, the most important cultural problems posed by the advent of literary modernism—its radical challenge to society and the paradoxically favorable reception of this challenge by society—have never become part of the context of courses or professional publications on modern literature.

Here the man of letters, with his concern for measuring literary tendencies in relation to the larger workings of culture as a whole, was badly needed. Yet it was precisely his concerns, which depended on a degree of independence from literary and professional vested interests, that the new professional modes pushed aside. The mark of the streamlined academic critical product, both in the classroom and the literary periodical, was an emphasis on the individual text and an indifference to its cultural implications. Explication of isolated texts was self-justifying, in need of no accompanying explanation of why or to what end it was pursued. Like literature itself—now increasingly said to be "its own reason for being," whatever that may have meant—the explication of a text re-

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quired no ulterior purpose. This neglect of ulterior cultural purposes in critical articles, as in the curriculum, permitted writers and teachers to ignore the fact that the purposes of both literature and criticism had become mysterious. Of course some professors did attempt to debate about them; but the debate itself, rather than becoming the central concern by which the study of modern literature oriented itself, became just another of the innumerable special "fields" open to professors and students. And as a special field, it was naturally dominated by critics who had no serious quarrel with modernist literature and ideas.

That criticism has lost its social bearings has been obscured by increasing refinements in its technical aspects. Taken together with the proliferation of new presses and journals that have arisen to publish them, these refinements create a powerful illusion that criticism flourishes as never before. "The Age of Criticism," Randall Jarrell christened it in 1952; yet his coinage was intended to be ironic, proceeding from his sense that something had gone wrong. What that might be was not a matter the literature departments at that time could pause to concern themselves about. Their mood was closer to the optimism reflected in Stanley Edgar Hyman's *The Armed Vision* (1948). Hyman's title celebrated without irony a criticism "armed" with diverse methodologies, though the goal of the campaign in which the armament was to be deployed was not clear.

The changes I have been surveying did not take place all at once. But if we look at two representative critical studies of modern literature that appeared in the thirties, we can make a case for locating the turning point sometime in that decade. The books are Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1931) and Cleanth Brooks's *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1938), which contains a critique of Wilson. Both writers are concerned with modern experimental literature: Brooks with its poetry alone, Wilson with its fiction as well. Both explain, analyze, and largely justify the emergent masterworks of modernism, in styles accessible to a broad audience. Yet there is a difference in their procedures and in the relation of each critic to his reader. Wilson brings much of what I have called the lay point of view to bear on his assessment of modernist works. He attacks Eliot and Valéry for encouraging "a conception of poetry as some sort of pure and rare aesthetic essence with no relation to any of the practical human uses for which, for some reason never explained, only the technique of prose is appropriate." He charges Valéry with "an impossible attempt to make aesthetic values independent of all the other values." He disputes Eliot's pronouncements on poetry and belief, arguing that when we read Lucretius and Dante "we are affected by them just as we are by prose writers of eloquence and imagination—we are compelled to take their opinions seriously." As these comments show,

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Wilson writes not only as if creative writers possess opinions, but as if these opinions matter, as if the health of our culture might be affected by whether they are right or wrong. He accuses Eliot of "a kind of reactionary point of view," and he says acutely: "We feel in contemporary writers like Eliot a desire to believe in religious revelation, a belief that it would be a good thing to believe, rather than a genuine belief. The faith of the modern convert seems to burn only with a low blue flame." These trenchant judgments express something more than an attempt to assign grades to writers or to rank them on some literary stock exchange. They express concern about the effect of literature on the health of culture.

Turning from Wilson to Brooks, one is first struck by the latter's considerably greater technical facility. Brooks's dealings with texts are to Wilson's somewhat as a machine gun is to a rifle. Yet with the advance in technical facility, one notices a corresponding decrease in critical pressure. Brooks is entirely concerned with overcoming lingering resistance toward modern poetry. Though he is not at all unmindful of the cultural questions Wilson raises, he treats these from a point of view hardly distinguishable from that of the texts with which he deals. Since Wilson's strictures against modern literature expressed the layman's anxieties, Brooks's strategy for disarming these strictures is particularly worth examining. He argues that Wilson has confused poetry with belief, and has thus proceeded as if "the poet might state [ideas] plainly if only he chose to." In other words, in questioning the substance of Eliot's and Valéry's verse, Wilson has succumbed to a crude form-content dualism that confuses poetry with statement. The poet, Brooks argues, does not make statements that we can separate from the whole of his work. "The experience which he 'communicates,' " Brooks writes, "is itself created by the organization of the symbols he uses. The total poem is therefore the communication, and indistinguishable from it."

Doubtless many of Brooks's readers, and many in the student body who would be taught by Brooks's readers, needed a dose of such medicine to cure them of their prejudices against modern poetry and their habit of reading poetry through the stock response of "message hunting." In a recently published retrospective article on "The New Criticism" (*Sewanee Review*, Fall 1979), Brooks recalls how in the early thirties, when he began teaching, some students "actually approached Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' in the same spirit and with the same expectations with which they approached an editorial in the local county newspaper or an advertisement in the current Sears, Roebuck catalogue." But Brooks's argument, as he stated it in 1938, appeared to be directed not only against this vulgar practice but against any attempt to assess a literary work in terms of its truth or falsity. The logical import of

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the argument seemed to legislate all statements out of literature, and thus left unclear how a literary work referred to reality—as Brooks nevertheless still insisted it did. Pressed on this question, he retorted in later works that he had not meant to cut literature off from life or deny its truth claims—that he had merely wanted to ensure "our dealing with the problem of truth at the level at which it is really relevant to literature."

So far so good, but just what level was that? Brooks and his New Critical colleagues never quite arrived at a coherent answer to this question, and his commitment to the view that literary truth is an affair not of correspondence with reality but of coherence with the internal "organization of symbols" prevented a coherent answer. Had he been willing to allow that both the internal organization of symbols and the correspondence or adequacy to external reality are relevant considerations in literary judgment—and at times he did seem to allow this, but never with theoretical consistency—Brooks might have got further. But then he would have had a different and, I suspect, more fruitful kind of quarrel with Wilson, for he would have had to defend the literary world view that Wilson had attacked, the world view largely of neotraditionalism. Brooks's choice of strategy causes him to retreat from such a confrontation by suggesting that it is a mistake to see views of life as advocated by the literature in question, indeed that it is a mistake to see literature as advocating anything. As Brooks would put the matter a decade later in *The Well Wrought Urn*, to ask a poem to achieve more than an internal psychological coherence "is to ask that poetry be something it does not pretend to be: philosophy."

It is one thing to say that poetry is not the Sears, Roebuck catalogue, another to say it is not philosophy. It is true that poetry is not *just* philosophy, but this does not mean it has nothing in common with philosophy, or that the only way one can distinguish it from philosophy is by divesting poetry of the capacity to make statements. Nevertheless, this non sequitur influenced the way literature was taught and written about in the university, and the consequences were far-ranging. To draw a sharp demarcation between poetry and philosophy was, after all, to place poetry (and, more generally, literature) above the sorts of criticism we make of most forms of language, relieving literature of obligations which, up to that time, people had looked to it to fulfill. I am not implying that a single critic brought on this change by himself; I cite Brooks's work as conveniently symptomatic of a more general trend, according to which it was no longer acceptable to praise or fault a literary work on the basis of the view of life which informs it. In practice, to be sure, Brooks and other New Critics did not hesitate to attribute large statements about the world to literary texts. Talk of "complexity" in

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poems became the favorite method of smuggling back that concern with truth which had, in principle, been proscribed. But this concern, in anything like the direct form in which critics like Wilson had expressed it, had forfeited its theoretical legitimacy. Henceforth any student or reader who asked what a literary work had to say and what that statement might be worth could be shown to have misunderstood the nature of literature.

This is not to say that Brooks's criticism avoided value questions. In many ways the New Criticism was a socially committed movement, dedicated to the romantic project of saving the world from the demoralization inflicted by science and—by the lights of the Agrarian wing—northern urban industrialism. The New Critics opposed what they saw as the value-free relativism of the historical scholars, against which they pitted their own severely normative reading of the history of English poetry. This reading, outlined by Eliot in "The Metaphysical Poets" and other early essays, ranked metaphysical and modern poetry high; neoclassical, romantic, and Victorian poetry low. The "the" in *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* suggests a more exclusive conception of the canon than the book itself argues for, yet there are occasional hints of exclusivity in Brooks's disparagement of much Victorian poetry in terms reminiscent of Eliot's diagnosis of "dissociation of sensibility." But Brooks was already liberalizing Eliot's judgments, and by 1947, when *The Well Wrought Urn* appeared, he had got rid of them entirely. In this later book, which answers the criticisms that had been directed against the narrowness of New Critical judgment, Brooks's earlier exclusivity has given way to an insistence on the universality of those virtues of paradox and ironic complexity that Eliot had conceded to Renaissance and modern poets alone. Anticipating any objections to parochialism, Brooks shows that poems by Gray, Pope, Wordsworth, Keats, and even Tennyson qualify as sufficiently paradoxical to rank on a footing with poems by Donne, Shakespeare, Herrick, and Yeats. He thus showed that the New Critical method could potentially vindicate all forms of poetry.

The trouble was, it vindicated them all too well. Discouraged by the critic from judging literary works by "extrinsic" standards, the reader was left to confine his judgments to the formal realm. Yet even the scope of formal criticism was restricted by the principle of literary autonomy, which makes it difficult to find fault with a work on the ground that it is badly written. This kind of judgment, which nobody hesitates to make about nonliterary kinds of writing, invokes preestablished principles of style and thus violates the rule that each work should be judged by the demands of its own organic form. Irvin Ehrenpreis has neatly summed up the strategy for annulling objections to bad writing in literature. "Modern criticism is not so clumsy," Ehrenpreis writes, "that it cannot

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dispose of the judgment that a poem is badly written. There are two approved techniques for smothering literary faultfinders. First, one says that the author meant to do what he did. Second, one says that style is mimetic or expressive, and it peculiarly suits the meaning." A good example of this second strategy in operation was Brooks's vindication, in *The Well Wrought Urn,* of Keats's "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," a proposition whose apparent vacuity had given Eliot trouble. Brooks rescued it by showing that it was not a proposition at all but a speech "in character" and thus appropriate to its dramatic situation.

Brooks's strategy typified the effortlessness with which academic explicators could find internal justifications for features of literary works that might otherwise have had to be counted as defects. I well recall one of my undergraduate papers in which I triumphantly demonstrated that the apparently confused sentiments of a poem by G. M. Hopkins were after all the sentiments of a persona and not of the author, so that the confusion, in effect, made the poem all the better. It would be only a mild overstatement to say that the very purpose of methodology in literary explication is to rationalize whatever might otherwise appear defective in a literary work. The effect, if not the intention, is to make literature immune to criticism.

My point is that this immunization of literature is not only a logical consequence of the reigning literary theories, but a practical consequence of the academic organization of criticism in classroom and journals, and its distribution into special fields. When criticism finally overcame the resistance of historical and philological scholars, it copied its enemies' behavior in at least one respect by accepting specialization. In a curious marriage of bureaucracy and romanticism, the distribution of criticism into specialties reinforced the worship of literature as a law unto itself. Insofar as the critic felt the pull of loyalty to his special field, he sacrificed his disinterestedness and became an adjunct to the system of promoting and publicizing literature. This is not to attack specialization as such, a necessary accompaniment of serious scholarship. With such specialization there goes a necessary and permissible identification with one's subject. But criticism is different; it surrenders its point of view when it takes on vested interests, especially at a time when not only authors and periods but ideas have become specialties. One can today be an Apocalypse Man. One can specialize in the literature of silence, of exhaustion, of the end of history and the death of man, not to mention the literature of feminism, fantasy, and homosexuality. Even the most intrepid voyagers into the abyss are committed to advancing the field, through house journals, conferences, and panels—and why not, if the profession is organized into a series of self-promoting small businesses?

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One effect of this specialization is to flatten literary discussion by eliminating real controversy. The specialists on each topic determine the range of questions that can be posed about it. Since the very establishment of the specialty presupposes its fundamental importance, this range of questions will probably include no very searching ones about the specialty's actual value. Vigorous debate occurs within the specialty, but it operates within the framework of assumptions that legitimates the field. Outsiders are free to challenge these assumptions, but their very status as outsiders makes it unnecessary for the insiders to take the challenge very seriously, or even to acknowledge its existence. Forty years ago, when academic criticism had not yet become confident of its position, Brooks had at least felt it necessary to answer Wilson's attacks on modern writers. By the next decade, in contrast, few specialists would have thought it necessary to acknowledge such attacks. Discussion of the writers was free to proceed as if the attacks had not been made.

Again, I do not suggest that all critics of a particular author need answer his detractors. But when it is felt that *nobody* need answer them, discussion in the field is impoverished. It is noteworthy in this connection that even the most professedly "radical" and "antithetical" of today's critics take far fewer risks in challenging the established canon than did "conservatives" like Winters and F. R. Leavis several decades ago. William E. Cain, in a recent essay in *College English* on "Deconstruction in America," notes acutely that despite their formal denunciations of conventional literary-historical hierarchies, deconstructers like J. Hillis Miller actually glorify the standard authors and works. "The deconstructive critic," Cain writes, "might do well to ask why his or her method, for all of its 'radical' mustering of terms and insights, leaves Wordsworth's authority and prestige so little changed."

If specialization tends to substitute a promotional for a critical mentality, this effect is reinforced by compulsory critical production. Again, one can trace a present problem to a failure of adaptation during the period when criticism entered the university, in this case a failure to recognize that in the expanded setting of mass education and large, diversified faculties, the earlier expectations of publication by professors no longer made sense. When the university enlarged its faculty, it failed to modify the requirement that all professors be "publishing scholars," though the definition of acceptable publication was broadened to include criticism and eventually creative writing. Indeed, publication requirements have actually stiffened as the university has grown, for growth means competition, and success in the competition is measured by the quantity and quality of a department's annual production. Publication was thus stimulated not by problems intrinsic to the subject matter, but rather by the need to have some measure of professional achievement by which to rate

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departments and to hire, fire, or promote scholars. Though probably only a small portion of professional publication is undertaken for motives of pure expediency, the fact that commentary on literary works is artificially stimulated cannot help having effects. As in the sphere of growth economy, an attitude develops which sees pure production as a good in itself: the more criticism accumulated around a given author or work, the better for all concerned—work, author, public, students, and the progress of criticism. A fragment of the literary terrain that has not yet been "covered" presumably cries out for remedial attention.

When professional jobs were plentiful, this artificial stimulation of fill-in-the-gap projects seemed relatively harmless. Such marginal work could still earn and preserve a teaching position, and some of it might very well prove useful. In a shrinking job market, where only large projects are likely to command attention from hiring and promotions committees, encouraging graduate students to undertake such projects is a cruel deception. On the other hand, the pressure to inflate the importance of one's topic or to tackle only very ambitious ones can also lead to disaster. Melvyn New has wittily described the convention that "the critic's work is of value insofar as it carries insight *beyond* that of any other reader to the *roots* of an idea, seeing *deeper* or more *profoundly*, the *real* issue which has thus far escaped others. The causes of this attitude are rather complex, but surely one of them is the simple necessity to clear a space for oneself in the academic marketplace, to establish oneself as a 'profound' and 'original' thinker within the five years allotted to tenure-earning." The obvious perversity of such expectations has led many scholars to wish that the publication requirement could be at least scaled down. But no department dares to take the first step because of the competitive situation of universities, which, like national superpowers, cannot risk unilateral disarmament lest they be overwhelmed by their adversaries.

The publish-or-perish system is a common target of professorial humor, yet its effects are no laughing matter. One effect is simply to destroy criticism. It stands to reason that if crude production is required, the application of rigorous standards to criticism will impose an intolerable drag on the market. If a work had to be truly worth interpreting before a book or article could be devoted to it, there would necessarily be fewer interpretive articles and books. If an interpretation had to meet rigorous standards of correctness, if one had to furnish evidence for it or ground it in a chain of reasoning that did not violate the law of noncontradiction, much criticism would never see print. Only if we can loosen the standards of correctness can we clear the way for "readings" that would otherwise have little chance of making the grade.

But we have to do even better than this if we expect to keep the criti-

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cal market moving. We have to try to spread the feeling that the very concept of interpretive correctness is an elitist myth propounded by antiquarian dryasdusts and scholarly bureaucrats. Just as puritanical restraints on pleasure had to be overcome to encourage mass consumption of commodities, reactionary controls on interpretation have to be lifted. Of course the attacks on interpretive controls are never couched in the frank rhetoric of marketing. Rather, they present themselves as radical criticism of the professional system. That system, it is charged, depends for its existence on holding the line, maintaining at all costs the distinction between right and wrong interpretations. If literary meaning were not construed as determinate and objective, the system would collapse, its elitist underpinning undone. In the recent manifesto *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Jacques Derrida puts the case with admirable clarity. Calling into question the idea of the text as a "finished corpus of writing," Derrida argues that "the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far." He then adds that this recognition of the indeterminacy of the text strikes at "the institution of literary studies in the university"—an institution "built on that very system of framing" which imposes borders and boundaries on the text.

But Derrida's argument contains a fatal flaw. If a group of anarchists were somehow to sabotage the brakes on all General Motors cars, this could conceivably so affect the sales of the product as to put the company out of business. But since nobody has to *buy* academic critical "products" in order for the industry to stay in business, sabotaging its conventional assumptions and methods, even by creating unconsumable criticism, does nothing but produce yet more critical articles and books. The fact that criticism as such may have been destroyed does not prevent it from flourishing as an institution. In point of fact, institutional arrangements are not likely to alter as faith in the determinacy of textual meanings weakens under the onslaughts of deconstructers. On the contrary, innumerable deconstructive readings have made it into *PMLA*, and a number of new journals have sprung up to publish the surplus.

I am not suggesting that the current pressure—to declare all literary texts "undecidable" and to reclassify literary criticism as a form of creative writing—derives from a conscious plot to make the world safe for academic publication at a moment when legitimate critical topics have become scarce. I am suggesting that some such effect has resulted from this pressure, whether consciously intended or not. It can hardly be a professional liability of the new methodologies of revisionary reading that they legitimize interpretations which would probably not survive without their benign assistance. If there must be a political analogy for our new libertarianism in interpretation, the true one lies not in revolutionary overthrow of oppressive institutions, but in laissez-faire opposi-

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tion to governmental regulation of industry. Translated into the operational terms of the critical marketplace, the recent attacks on interpretive controls are not revolutionary but entrepreneurial.

If critical production is compulsory, then one of the chief measures of the value of a critical approach will be the degree to which it inspires more criticism. This explains the popularity of critical approaches which provide easily portable methods of generating new readings—approaches which permit the fledgling critic to produce readings of texts as "self-consuming artifacts," say, or as exemplifications of archetypes or of "revisionary ratios." But even a perpetually renewable supply of such portable methodologies may not be enough to assure continued production; it is also necessary to expand the range of these methodologies as far as they will go. Hence the imperialist impulse that characterizes the life cycle of a critical approach: an approach originally contrived to deal with a particular literary type (which genuinely does call for new critical concepts) is extended to other types until finally it is put forth as the key to all literature. As we saw earlier, the New Criticism's concepts of irony, paradox, and ambiguity were at first applied mainly to Renaissance and modern poetry, to the discredit of other kinds. But it soon developed that these other kinds also had the approved characteristics and that these characteristics were in fact the essence of poetry itself. A bit later, a concern with "existential" themes, first inspired by such writers as Sartre, Camus, and Céline, was discovered in Shakespeare (who became "our contemporary") and in due course arrived at a similar universalization.

But these two ways of producing novel interpretations have now fallen victim to the built-in obsolescence of critical approaches. They have given way to the new obligatory way of reading literary works—as commentaries on themselves or on their own textual problematics, their failure to cohere around a center. Nobody can deny that over the last decade there has arisen a class of works which demand to be read as reflexive structures, as commentaries on their own fictive nature and thus on the fallibility of their attempts to make sense of the world. But why restrict this reflexive mode of reading to works that happen to have been designed explicitly to invite it? What prevents us from asserting that all literature is unavoidably about its own problematics, its own undecidability and unreadability? Is it not, after all, *interesting* to reinterpret literary works as demonstrations of their own inability to refer to reality? Hence the irresistible appeal of Paul de Man's assertion that all literature (including even the *Iliad*) "knows and names itself" as fiction and of Geoffrey Hartman's assertion that "to suggest that meaning and language do not coincide . . . is merely to restate what literature has always revealed." Whatever the merits of these generalizations, it should be

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clear that we could hardly think up more promising inducements for revising the literary canon from Homer on up.

The professional study of literature in the United States is now one hundred years old. When it came into being, with the establishment of the university literature departments, the relation between literature and society had already begun to seem problematic. The romantic, naturalistic, aesthetic, and other nineteenth-century literary rebellions had reflected the fact that literary culture was ceasing to express official social beliefs and values. This is now evident through hindsight, but until around 1914 it was still possible to believe that the literary tradition—as embodied in the university—and the institutions of society were essentially one. It was not necessary for professional literary study to pose the question of literature's relation to the social order, because that relation could still be taken for granted. And the literature which most sharply questioned this relation, or sought to alter it, did not have to be confronted.

As the genteel culture disintegrated, so did the context of literary study. Literary study could no longer proceed as if a consensus existed about the purposes of literature, about its place and function in society. The breaking up of this study into discrete and unrelated fields had occurred at a time when it was still believed that the larger questions of purpose would take care of themselves. But now these larger questions are contested, and they do not take care of themselves. In such a situation, the only recourse is to try to bring the confusion over these questions into coherent debate. This goal the university has not been able to accomplish, at least not in any central way in the curriculum or in the publications it subsidizes. In the absence of such a debate, academic literary criticism remains rootless and inconsequential, though not without influence. It remains governed by a series of fads, each of which generates newly mythical readings. The succession of these readings lends credibility to the doctrine that all readings are myths. While this situation persists, criticism has less and less claim to be a mode of serious inquiry. Though outwardly it seems to prosper, criticism expires from within.

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Help from History

WILLIAM STAFFORD

Please help me know it happened,
that life I thought we had—

Our friends holding out their hands
to us—
Our enemies mistaken, infected by
unaccountable prejudice—
Our country benevolent, a model
for all governments, goodwilled—
Those mad rulers at times elsewhere,
inhuman and yet mob-worshipped,
leaders of monstrous doctrine, unspeakable
beyond belief, yet strangely attractive to
the uninstructed.

And please let me believe these incredible
legends that have dignified our lives—

The wife or husband helplessly loving us,
the children full of awe and affection,
the dog insanely faithful—
Our growing up hard—hard times, being
industrious and reliable—
The places we lived arched full of
serene golden light—

Now, menaced by judgments, overheard revisions,
let me retain what ignorance it takes
to preserve what we need—
a past that redeems any future.

WILLIAM STAFFORD teaches literature at Lewis and Clark College. A new collection of his poems, *Things That Happen Where There Aren't Any People*, was published earlier this year.

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Oh Mom, Poor Mom!

ISA KAPP

ALONGSIDE A SMALL TREE and rectangular pond in the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., there is a reclining figure (by Henri Laurens) of a woman in utmost repose. Her stomach is a comfortable hill, and she exudes largesse, self-containment, and serenity. Entitled *Maternity,* she represents the way women are seen in art, in Italian opera, and even in tinted imitations of life like the Pampers and baby aspirin ads—but hardly ever in the real modern world. Once in a blue moon, a rash specimen of motherly composure bicycles along a suburban road while her baby takes the air in a wire basket suspended behind; more often, we run into an anxious maternal smile across the backyard hedge, a shrill voice, or a sad heart in the supermarket.

Oddly enough, the most awkward and inept of women, in this generation of worriers, can recognize in herself some fragment of art's idealized mother images. She has that initial sense, when her baby is born, of being brushed with divinity, which radiates from the Renaissance Madonnas; and feels the connection, without benefit of yoga, to a universal process and a cosmic pride. It is a moment when even the most scrawny and urban of us—perhaps lifted by the heady aroma of clean linen, oil, Desitin, and milk—imagines in herself a peasant strength and an ample bosom. At that moment we are more benign to ourselves, and closer and more generous to other women, than at almost any other time. Few sights are comelier than a new mother with her baby, and Mary Cassatt's painting *Mother and Child* (in the National Gallery of Art) is light green, gold, yellow—the colors of growth and spring; a large daisy, for sunny thoughts perhaps, and a swoop of orange robe, for the pleasures of touch. The mother holds her naked baby up in front of the mirror, and behind it another mirror reflects them both, so that she can simultaneously display and admire the baby's image and the handsome picture they make together. How could the artist have imagined, in the late nineteenth century, that modern mothers, heiresses of all the ages when it comes to comfort, education, and opportunity, would in our century turn their natural privileges into oppressive problems?

The mother-offspring tie is located so deep in the nerves that a cer-

✪ ISA KAPP's work has appeared in the *Washington Post, Commentary,* and the *New Leader.*

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tain inflection in a mother's voice, an unexpected tremor in a mother's kisses can shake the confidence of a middle-aged son. A daughter can recognize her mother's ring on the phone and can divine the configuration of her mother's feelings long before they settle into focus. To each other their faces are open books. This extraordinary intimacy affects women's spirits so tempestuously that we have to generate some counterbalancing ordinariness and restraint in our domestic habits. Although an offhand, unceremonious manner often works wonders with total strangers, what families—close, impulsive, and emotionally ungarbed—most require is the exact reverse: a touch of formality. In *Snatched from Oblivion*, a wholesomely anachronistic memoir of a crowded, active, Spartan family in Cambridge, Marian Schlesinger writes:

> I have often wondered how a complicated household like ours survived with such an atmosphere of peace about it. Perhaps in some sense it rested in the old-fashioned virtue of good manners among adults and a built-in reserve on the part of each, and emotional distance maintained instinctively, which was something distinct from the warmth and humor they shared.

But Mrs. Schlesinger's memoir is a positive oddity seen against the virulence of best-sellers like Christina Crawford's *Mommie Dearest* and the rampant dissatisfaction of Nancy Friday's *My Mother/My Self*, in its unspoiled amity and appreciation for her own relatives. Mrs. Schlesinger's family was above all "old-fashioned." Reserve (as much of a drawback, in some minds, as inhibition) is perhaps the least valued commodity in a society that has so elevated the importance of "communication," and the monosyllabic New Englander, though still sporadically useful to the Pepperidge Farm company, may be the American most Americans would like to see vanishing. Nor do modern mothers have the advantage of finding that discipline, absolutely essential to their enterprise, is culturally in high repute. Cacophonous music, action painting, and psychology are all intended to persuade us that the disorderly part of us is the most interesting; even children's verse is no longer reliably in rhyme, like Robert Louis Stevenson's, but free, as is the expression of their wishes and resentments.

We are suffering, in many ways, simply from living in a psychoanalytic era, and are more often at its mercy than able to profit from it. If to analyze were synonymous with arriving at the whole truth about ourselves and others, that might make the process worthwhile (though dramatists have been telling us since Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* that it's not necessarily so). But many of us have merely skimmed off the language—castration, Oedipus, projection, ambivalence—in a way that makes it a provocation and a threat rather than a pathway to our real selves. These words are close enough to our viscera to lure us and scare us. They linger

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in our mentality (and the media's—one has only to think of David Susskind's smoked-salmon voice lapping up the entire panoply of known neuroses) as if we were, in our middle-class culture, members of a gigantic encounter group, allowing our privacy to be assaulted and battered, and assenting to common slogans and values. Not equipped for precise, Olympian investigations that might begin to approximate reality, we settle for grim catchwords that whet our appetite for grievance and inadequacy. We have achieved a kind of fool's sophistication. Awful and damaging as this can be among friends or between lovers, it seems infinitely more unnatural and perverse within the closeness of the family. When it intervenes in the primal, unavoidable relations between mother and child, we need, in sheer self-defense, to take a giant step backward to the innocence of the unexamined life.

This is not to say that family exasperations do not often require healing. But one has to distinguish between therapy's goal—to reinterpret experience more soundly, to help its recipients face aspects of themselves more bravely—and its troubling residue and aura. David Riesman, writing in *The Lonely Crowd* about the bossy, "inner-directed" parents of Theobald in Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, says that even if they crushed the boy's spontaneity and made him feel like a prisoner, he was at least not too anxious behind his bars. In our day an oversusceptibility to the literal structures of Freudian psychology (usually ingested vicariously, via hasty summary and without attention to Freud's own dogged, circumspect method of reaching a conclusion) deposits a vapor of anxiety over all our behavior. For mothers, it enlarges difficulties that are at best concrete and self-limiting and at worst inevitable. At times it hardens the outlines of a problem by definition, so that it can never again be warmed or domesticated at the family hearth.

In *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch speaks of the devaluation of parenthood by the so-called helping professions (pediatrician, teacher, therapist) which have "created an ideal of perfect parenthood while destroying parents' confidence in their ability to perform the most elementary functions of childrearing." According to Lasch, the decline of confidence goes back to the beginning of modern industry, when fathers could no longer bring their work back home or teach their children the skills that went into it. Eventually other aspects of child care were taken out of the parents' hands, and they "were left with little but love to transmit to their children." Love unaccompanied by authority is not an unfair description of the environment that produced the upheaval among the young in the 1960s. If they were self-centered, dependent, and unprepared for difficulty, Midge Decter argues in *Liberal Parents, Radical Children*, it was because "we refused to assume, partly on ideological grounds but partly also on aesthetic grounds, one of the central

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obligations of parenthood: to make ourselves the final authority on good and bad, right and wrong. And to take the consequences of what might turn out to be a life-long battle."

Not only does today's mother not genuinely feel herself a final authority—because of issues about which she has never made up her mind or is of two minds—but she does not really enjoy authority as much as she enjoys being likable. The parents of an only child, a couple who seemed capable and decisive in other matters, recently told me that they sent their son to boarding school because they could not tolerate "confrontation." Battling does not appeal to us at all; being buddies with our children does. We may be remembered as the mildest generation of mothers in history.

To boot, we conspire in our own undoing by steadily seeking counsel from without. Mothers are so unsure of themselves that they distractedly consult advice books, call TOT and HOT lines, and form groups like Parents Anonymous. Some fifty thousand adults are enrolled in psychologist Thomas Gordon's Parent Effectiveness Training workshops to learn the "no-lose" method of child rearing. And in the public library several long shelves devoted to parent-child relations are placed, by the logic of the Dewey Decimal System, adjacent to homosexuality, insanity, and divorce.

Whenever a mother hesitates, she can count on receiving a clue to action, though not always a decisive one, as is evident in this sample from Paul S. Graubard's *Positive Parenthood*: "Punishment can be an invaluable aid in helping children learn. It can also have far reaching negative effects. A balance must be found between the two." Challenging questions like "Is the punishment justified? Are you trying to impose your will on the child? Is the punishment precise? Is the punishment effective?" are calculated to drive a run-of-the-mill mother to despair. The books cover an extensive area of parental concern, from teaching a child how to shoo away strange dogs to responding properly to the onset of femininity in one's daughter, and all of them gravely remind us to convey affection to our children.

In recent years, out of deference to feminism, the books tend to take the mother's part—and to raise her anguish-consciousness. One publisher's threatened contribution, entitled *How to Be a Mother and a Person Too* (with the subhead "How a Mother Can Cope with Bringing Up Children without Losing Good Humor, Good Spirit and Personal Identity") clearly bears the implication of slim chances. A popular paperback, *The Mother Knot* by Jane Lazarre (considered important and enlightening by the feminist poet Adrienne Rich), describes long, grueling hours of difficult childbirth and the complications of expecting a baby in an interracial marriage, but is mainly up in arms against motherhood's

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interference with sleep, sex, and postgraduate degrees. *The Baby Trap* is a prenatal warning; *The Mother Person*, a complaint that the author is bored with "harrowing" chores, inclement weather, baby, and books by Jean Piaget; and *Mother's Day Is Over*, an admission that "I'm a lousy disciplinarian, I'm nervous, and I detest camping." Though there is something in what all these books say, it is not very much and not said very well. But whether the authors are experts or victims, the mere fact that they seem to know our weaknesses can be very seductive.

Two recently published books, however, are worth reading, if only because their information and points of view are not easily come by. The first is Selma Fraiberg's *Every Child's Birthright: In Defense of Mothering*, intended to fortify mothers against the ideological onslaught of the women's liberation movement. Dr. Fraiberg urges mothers who are too easily fired by free-floating ambition not to undervalue their importance as the best caretakers of their babies. They should consider, before rushing off to the employment agency, that there is as yet no adequate mother substitute for the preschool child, who does not enjoy a nine- or ten-hour separation from her and can't profit educationally from it. And there is no "ideal" nursery available, merely one that offers custodial care, usually with an indifference that does the child actual harm. Dr. Fraiberg takes a kindly tone toward mothers who want or need to work all day, perhaps recognizing that the accidental convergence of expanding feminism and inflation's whittling away of income creates a twofold pressure that is hard to resist. But she nevertheless provides the necessary inoculation against a mindless rash of prescriptions for behavior imposed from without, by a small minority, very probably for their own purposes. If indeed some kind of vanity is motivating mothers to go to work, it makes sense to remind them that they are forgoing an absorbing, natural job in which they are more likely to be useful and qualified than the one to which they aspire.

Common sense doesn't by itself make good books, but Selma Fraiberg, in addition to being a professor of psychoanalysis at the University of Michigan, is an especially fine writer. In the following passage she manages to resurrect the word "love" (between mother and child) in its original clear force, uncontaminated by droning decades of hippie, encounter-group, and rock-record loves:

> During the first six months, the baby has the rudiments of a love language available to him. There is the language of the embrace, the language of the eyes, the language of the smile, vocal communications of pleasure and distress. . . . Eighteen years later . . . he will use such phrases as "When I first looked into your eyes," "When you smiled at me," "When I held you in my arms." And naturally in his exalted state, he will believe he invented this love song.

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With the possible exception of *Infant and Child in the Culture of Today* by Dr. Arnold Gesell, whose physiological lyricism I was totally smitten with when my daughter was six months old, there is no book about parents and children that I have admired (and regretted not having many years ago) as much as Elaine Heffner's *Mothering*. Though Mrs. Heffner teaches psychiatry at Cornell University Medical College and is co-director of a nursery school clinic at New York Hospital, she is writing partly to rescue mothers from the incursions of the professional expert who, she believes, undermines their feeling of competence. Her book is built upon a few principles that are too broad and plain to be formally termed psychological: first, that a mother's understanding of her child can be trusted and, second, that there is a distinction to be made between feelings and behavior. That is, a child (or mother) may need to do something she doesn't like and, on the other hand, she may feel something (for example, anger) that she should not do anything about. Mrs. Heffner's third point is that unacceptable behavior in a child is simply an awkwardly conveyed message of frustration; once the mother can tolerate, and teach the child to tolerate, the inevitability of frustration in life, she will be able to impart some more agreeable means of self-expression. All too many mothers suffer from low opinions of themselves, and that, rather than their oversights and transgressions against their infants, is responsible for most of their mothering woes. Of course, such phrases and progressions of thought do come out of the lore of psychology, but at least they are not doctrinal; they are simply attentive to what can be seen happening and are insistent upon careful differentiations in reasoning.

In the course of demonstrating that cultural ideas affect the way parents act, Mrs. Heffner observes that the ascendancy of Freudian concepts during the last three decades ushered in an unfortunate emphasis on gratification of children's needs at the expense of regard for others—an emphasis that Freud himself (convinced that selective repression was necessary for the benefit of civilization) would have roundly disapproved. No less inimical to his astringent way of thinking would be the current effluvium of reminiscences that exploit early experience for the purpose of stewing in adult neurosis. In such books as Lucy Freeman's *Who Is Sylvia?* and Nancy Friday's *My Mother/My Self*, both of which derive a specious fictional allure from recasting memory to suit the desired interpretation, the chief adversary and source of the author's unhappiness proves to be, not unexpectedly, her mother.

Until recently, fiction dealt more often with fathers, as in the novels of Joyce, Turgenev, and Balzac, than with mothers. When they did appear, mothers tended to be giddy and sentimental, like the Countess Ros-

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tov in *War and Peace*, or all gossip and nerves, like Mrs. Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, "a woman of mean understanding, little information and uncertain temper." Philip Roth made the transition by escorting the mother onto center stage in the role of scapegoat; and in the wake of feminism, a succession of bitter novels like Alison Lurie's *The War Between the Tates* and Paula Fox's *The Widow's Children* exposed their pernicious influence.

It is logical enough that mothers should have feminism to thank for their more acknowledged, determining, and solemnly discussed position in society. We are, after all, producing more female writers, memoirists, and critics, so women have a vested interest, as well as an innocent one, in remembering their mothers and considering themselves in a motherly light. This in turn has led them to analyze themselves and their mothers. Right here, at the consummation of a murky alliance between Freud and feminism (strange bedfellows), where inner anarchy and social grievance reinforce each other, the beneficial effect of the entire investigation comes into question. As does, indeed, the whole modern exacerbation of self-awareness. Are we more enlightened, or more wasted and damaged, by studying our resentments?

Nancy Friday may believe that she is rendering a therapeutic service to the sorority of the discontented by tracing their chronic anxieties to insufficient maternal closeness during infancy. But the spectacle of a middle-aged woman writing a bookful of quick psychiatric "insights," all the while blaming her own mother for misfortunes over which she had no control, is not a heartening one. Even more depressing is Lucy Freeman's revival, in her sixties, of the adolescent Freudian drama in which she played the role of Electra. Apparently years of psychoanalysis and decades of writing about psychology have not mitigated in the least her sense of disorder and early sorrow. But the logic of our culture, carried to its most absurd, is to be found in a poem by a university English professor, Virginia Terris:

> I was brought up to be a nice girl
> and I have been paying you mother
> ever since
>
> in the just missed orgasm

Professor Terris's poetry has been compared by a critic to the finely chiseled lyrics of Emily Dickinson.

A recent article in the *New York Times Magazine* culls evidence (in honor of Mother's Day) that many American daughters are not on satisfactory terms with their mothers. "We visit a lot, take vacations together and talk on the phone a lot," laments a thirty-one-year-old Colorado editor, "but I never feel my mother accepts or likes me." The author of the

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article, who teaches a college literature course entitled "Mothers and Daughters," ends her research on a sanguine note: "As mothers begin to articulate their own feelings and daughters to express theirs, and each listens to the other, these exchanges may serve in the end to unsnarl the bonds between them."

Could the author have seen Ingmar Bergman's racking movie *Autumn Sonata*? It begins with the timid married daughter (Liv Ullmann) looking forward with nervous eagerness to a visit from her mother (Ingrid Bergman), a celebrated concert pianist whom she has not seen for many years. There is a brief flurry of embraces and endearments, but it takes only one episode—the older woman's criticism of the younger one's piano playing—to touch off a flood of accusations against the mother for her coldness and unconcern. What seems to me most striking about this film is not its dogged pursuit of the manifold reasons why the pair are tense and uneasy with one another, but the fact that their outpouring of recrimination and remorse gets them absolutely nowhere. Ingrid Bergman's lined, hurt face may give viewers the impression that she has somehow been transformed by self-knowledge, but the plot, more honest, finishes with her going back to her businesslike, self-concerned ways. Americans must be startled to see these familiar waves of emotion sent to us from across the ocean. Like inflation, infections of the mind seem to break out simultaneously all over the world.

Of course, most of our friends and neighbors are not very much like Lucy Freeman, Nancy Friday, or Eva of *Autumn Sonata*, and neither, with a little bit of luck, are their daughters. One sees harmonious mother-daughter combinations shopping in malls, playing tennis, and traveling across Europe together. I have a friend whose best dresses are sewn by her daughter, and I know a woman who can sit peacefully through a dinner party with her mother's hand reposing in hers. Still it is not easy, as an intelligent young lady recently mused, to be a natural mother nowadays.

Ironically, we need not have gone looking for trouble, as my own generation did, when it came to raising our children, because nature had already provided enough obstacles to test our fiber. Early on we have had to contend with the trauma of growth: the warm, delectable baby to whom we had a bodily connection reared up, long before we were ready, as a moody teenager who closed her bedroom door and from behind it delivered a stern judgment of us. To be regarded as an ideal mother one ought, obviously, to be strong yet gentle, flexible yet decisive, humorous but not sardonic, comforting but not condescending, busy yet patient. And even if all that were possible, one would be fortunate indeed, as Margaret Mead once remarked, if one were granted a congenial child.

In the novel *Sula* by Toni Morrison, set in a Negro neighborhood

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called the Bottom, in Medallion, Ohio, several friends are conversing in the kitchen.

> The two women were fanning themselves and watching Hannah put down some dough, all talking casually about one thing and another, and had gotten around, when Sula passed by, to the problems of child rearing.
>
> "They a pain."
>
> "Yeh. Wish I'd listened to Mamma. She told me not to have 'em too soon."
>
> "Any time at all is too soon for me."
>
> "Oh, I don't know. My Rudy minds his daddy. He just wild with me. Be glad when he growed and gone."
>
> Hannah smiled and said, "Shut your mouth. You love the ground he pee on."
>
> "Sure I do. But he still a pain. Can't help loving your own child. No matter what they do."
>
> "Well, Hester grown now and I can't say love is exactly what I feel."
>
> "Sure you do. You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference."
>
> "Guess so. Likin' them is another thing."
>
> "Sure. They different people, you know."

Since both the genetic attributes of our offspring and our temperaments as parents can either be miraculously disposed or egregiously bollixed up in infinite ways, mothers have had to gird themselves perennially for unpredictable enchantment or dismay. Could the wayward and improvident father of Dickens have forecast his brilliant and resourceful son? How do shrews produce diplomats, boneheads geniuses, and cowards conquering heroes? We are in the grip of biological imponderables, subjects of the physical universe, our only recourse a gracious bow. That is why psychology seems so querulous and narrow a discipline to apply in our attachments to our children. Something wide, not deep, seems to be called for, and if it must be something intellectual, let it at least be philosophy, with its cosmic reach.

But it need not be intellectual, as it may astonish us to find out when we read the anthropologist Robert Briffault's prodigious work *The Mothers*. There we learn that baboons wash their young in a stream, that some monkey mothers die of grief when deprived of their young, and that there are cases on record of a monkey placing its body between its child and the hunters' guns, and so sacrificing its life for its offspring. Among primitive societies—the Eskimos, the Melanesians, and some West African tribes—maternal love long precedes and far outweighs love between the sexes, and is the strongest of all human ties. We have to wonder why, so much later, at our overprivileged moment of history, what was once an instinct requires so much study and causes so much discomfiture.

To find in modern literature the expression of an unashamed and yet

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(far more rare) complicated love of a child for its mother, one has to go quite far back, to an exceptional novel published in 1934, Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep,* about an immigrant family living on New York's East Side, told from the point of view of a six-year-old child:

> Friday. Rain. The end of school. He could stay home now, stay home and do nothing, stay near his mother the whole afternoon. He turned from the window and regarded her. She was seated before the table paring beets. The first cut into a beet was like lifting a lid from a tiny stove. Sudden purple under the peel; her hands were stained with it. Above her blue and white checkered apron her face bent down, intent upon her work, her lips pressed gravely together. He loved her. He was happy again.

Genya is an old-fashioned Jewish mother, the sort of woman Irving Howe describes in *World of Our Fathers* as "drawing a circle of safety in which her children could breathe." Longer ago still, nineteenth-century American culture produced the wonderful grandmother recalled by Marian Schlesinger who "read voraciously, made clothes, covered furniture, saw to the planting of the flower garden and the trees around the place, guided her children's education . . . rode horseback with a passion . . . laid out the dead, comforted the afflicted." A Renaissance woman in Minnesota. Needless to say, we cannot resurrect the spirit of another age, exuberant and self-assured, or the setting, with its tonic scenes of relished activity and hard work. How much easier it is to feel affection for the benevolent, supervisory old-time mother, who stood a little to the side, seeing that everything went smoothly, than for the close, solicitous, intimate mother of today (her child's admirer and rival) whose dignity has shrunk even as her presence has become ubiquitous and inescapable. What was Mrs. Portnoy's sin if not her hyperalertness, her incessant "give and take" (as a liberated father once described his wrangling with his daughter), her sheer inability to stay away from her son? We *can* retrieve the old-fashioned virtues—decorum, hardiness, self-possession; even the buoyant stoicism reflected in the lines of George Meredith's poem will come in handy:

> When her mother tends her before the laughing mirror
> Tying up her laces, looping up her hair
> Often she thinks, were this wild thing wedded
> More love should I have, and much less care.

"Mothering!" grumbled an amicable acquaintance. "Please tell me how it's done. Right now I'm off to walk the dog, a beast predictable in his needs and delightfully grateful for services rendered." In relations between mother and child there is no fairness nor, as there must be in all other relations, real reciprocity. No matter how unappreciated, even ill

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attuned, a mother feels, she necessarily shares (and her spirits rise at) the least sign of well-being, accomplishment, even casual pleasure on the part of her child. Exactly from this benign impulse, aggrandized as we all grow better educated, more articulate, and more ambitious, comes the nucleus of trouble: identifying, in blazing daylight, with the triumphs and mortifications of our progeny. Our children see this in us, and they tense their nerves and bare their teeth.

A few years ago on a television program called *Music in Jerusalem*, Gina Bachauer was playing a Mozart sonata for two pianos with a younger student. The camera switched from the same theme being played by the masterful, experienced hands of the older woman to the smooth ones, already firm and capable, of the younger. That could be, in a nutshell, the instructive and empathetic union between mother and child: freed from the fevers of the biological tie, comrades at last in some enterprise larger than themselves.

Fortunately, new mothers come innocently out of the maternity wards each day, their arms and their babies still soft and pliant. They are full of body warmth and hopeful delight—their minds, their sense of promise for the moment untarnished by anxiety or sophistication. They expect, rightfully, that perfect gladness with which Corot imbued his painting *Madame Stumpf and Her Daughter.* The two are standing in the woods, the mother's face delicate and receptive, as is the deep gray-blue of her gown, with one rose at the bosom. She is holding a parasol and looks like the vessel and the beneficiary of nature. The little girl is in white and is poised, lively and eager, with her skirt tucked up to hold the bouquet of flowers she has gathered for her mother. A dream, an idyll perhaps, but a vision of motherhood sadly lacking in our contemporary literature and culture.

Mary Moore Molony

1912–1980

Managing Editor, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, *1961–1972*

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Valediction

LAWRENCE RAAB

Sometimes I can believe
it's almost a comfort,
that loss could be
like a blanket drawn above the shoulders,
snuggled into deeply. And how perfectly
it fits my body. So I'd remain

all night, sleeping as a child does,
surrounded and protected.
Waking at any hour I'd hear
the familiar slip and wash of water,
or a little wind high in the trees.

In this way your life
might be consigned to memory.
Though still I find myself asking:
Did you see me standing beside your bed?
Did you hear me speaking?

Yes, I saw you
beside my bed.
Yes, I heard you speaking.

When I turn to the window
the lake does not look so dark,

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lit up with its stars,
the air does not feel so cold.
Could you hear what I was saying?

I wanted you to be happy.
That's all I ever really wanted.

So I might rise
quietly and walk downstairs,
across the porch and down
to the beach, to the lip of the water.
Standing there, I'd watch the shapes

of trees extend their darkness,
hear the water move a little toward me.
But it's only myself I'd find looking
back out of that stillness,
one shadow among others,
featureless and alone.

✪ LAWRENCE RAAB, who teaches English at Williams College, is the author of two volumes of poetry, *Mysteries of the Horizon* and *The Collector of Cold Weather.*

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Under a White Shawl of Pine

DAVE SMITH

They came to the small pier, submerged, where our rowboat
dangled on a tether of rope and gathered water once.
Moonlight raised some of the boards. Their feet,
as they walked out, glistened and seemed to dance.

We could not hear their love step on the light surface
but saw them lean and sway and glint, night-swallows
we said, though we knew their names, the blessed
look of lovers walked beyond the sun's blistering glow.

Then they were gone, and the planks drifted somewhere.
Why do we lean after them when they are not real,
when we are certain the heart can bear no more
reality, or even the ocean's blue everpresent squeal?

The random pulse and impulse of the sea comes soft
but has been hard and houses here have been broken.
We throw more wood on the fire and watch a draft
from far out swirl smoke in as if some word, spoken,

comes back across the dark slick to answer itself.
Light ripples just beyond the surf, where the pier ends,
and may be only their tossed beer can that drifts.
Why do we love this wreckage with no intent?

We think we hear him remark to her, enigmatically, on
action, reaction, the predictable odds of survival
love has against this world. Then they are gone,
the conversation is ours, the yearning to be, to feel

the rhythm that grinds the flesh of the shore is ours.
At first we fill the quiet room with speculation,

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screeching like gulls, eyes yellow with fire.
We invent what is, was, will be, their destination,

a room under a white shawl of pine, sand and a long kiss.
The night grows baffling and the moon lies breast-white
as a footpath of joy on the sea. It invites us
to forget that fire that flakes and stutters in dry-

rotted wood we picked from the tide piece by piece.
We saw them, the shadows of a man and a woman,
but who were they? Who are we, we mean.
Exhausting the possibilities, we drive ourselves on

until the darkness in the east begins its looming gray.
Now there is only slick of mud, tide going, black
stumps of pier rising in collapse, two gulls splayed
rigidly above the lipped, red horizon of the Atlantic.

We remember the lost rowboat, the first days in this house,
but were they real, the lovers? What evidence?
We breathe the cold where we live, the fire out,
our voices low, cracked, barely whispering of love rent.

✪ DAVE SMITH is director of creative writing at the University of Utah. He is the author of *The Fisherman's Whore, Cumberland Station*, and *Goshawk, Antelope.*

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Victorian Sexuality

Old Texts and New Insights

PETER GAY

Sex is always interesting, but what we summarily—and complacently—call "Victorian sex" has long had a special claim on our attention. It permits us to enjoy scandalous tales of deviance and despair. The fate of Oscar Wilde inevitably comes to mind first, but so do the sensational death of France's President Félix Faure after the visit of a cocotte, Lewis Carroll's barely concealed taste for prepubescent girls, and Algernon Swinburne's no less aberrant wish for the whip. And beyond providing entertainment, Victorian sexuality offers another, still larger dividend: it permits us to feel superior. The Victorians were repressed and repressive; we are happily liberated. In the age of the queen who was not amused, respectable husbands used their wives to make children and prostitutes to have pleasure. It could not be otherwise: married women of the better sort were free from the importunities of sexual appetite, and that is why men—incorrigible beasts, all of them, except for inhibited secular saints, who were, if anything, even more peculiar and less likable—got their erotic enjoyment anywhere but at home. The feeble old joke about the English mother instructing her daughter in the facts of life on the eve of her wedding day strikes most twentieth-century readers as the condensed transcription of a widespread and pathetic state of affairs: "When your husband seeks to force his attentions on you, just close your eyes and think of England." Since "Victorianism" is a collective name for genteel conduct far beyond Victoria's realm, there must have been thousands of middle-class brides who closed their eyes and thought of Germany, France, or Switzerland.

The bulky and growing series of volumes on nineteenth-century sexuality recently issued by Arno Press gives us an opportunity to review and revise this pleasing and reassuring picture of Victorian sex. If we have long believed that the Victorians were arrant hypocrites engaged in a conspiracy of silence about the human body, these books will assist us in seeing that this pharisaic view of our nineteenth-century forebears is all nonsense, or at best a superficial reading of pathology. Paradoxically, our recent candor in sexual matters has only served to lend this self-satisfied cluster of clichés the prestige of what parades as serious, responsible scholarship. Enabled to write freely about reticence, historians of varying degrees of competence have indulged in higher gossip amounting, in long, luxuriant passages, to a kind of soft pornography. The very titles of their books—*The Worm in the Bud* and, even more promisingly, *The Dark Angel,* to say nothing of the alliterative *Madonnas and Magdalens*—invite the panting reader to a feast of secrets just unveiled. Or familiar stories may be lovingly retold: stories of pious pastors leering at naked bathing beauties, of sober family men sneaking into opulent brothels, of blasé worldlings picking up sailors to practice the vice that has no name—*had* no name then, I should say, for in our time we have made sure that every taste, every morsel on the menu of sexual pleasure, has a name and its publicity agent.

I have no intention of questioning the facts or the quotations that this modern crop of

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candor has gathered for our indignant delectation; I have drawn instruction from all these titles. But I question the representativeness of their anecdotes and the sobriety of their analyses. Whatever their authors' motives, the result simply corroborates what we first need urgently to investigate and then, as I have said, to revise. This, then, is the paradox of the recent rash of books on Victorian sexuality. However portentous their tone, however earnest their footnotes, they have perpetuated myths that everyone has thoughtlessly parroted since these were first generated in the time of Victoria.

In sober truth, the evidence amounts to very little. These exposés tend to take the eccentric as typical, the angry outsider as a fount of sociological wisdom, the isolated passage as grounds for sweeping condemnations. To be sure, this consensus has not remained unbroken. A few biographers have cut loose from the stereotypes; a few historians have raised flags of warning. (Possibly the best recent reappraisal, short but meaty, is F. Barry Smith's article, "Sexuality in Britain, 1800–1900: Some Suggested Revisions," published in 1977 in Martha Vicinus's anthology, *The Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*.) But one recent book on Victorian sexuality—Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians*, first published in 1966 and much quoted since—has perpetuated the old clichés and breathed new vitality into them. The book flatters us; it condescends, subtly but pitilessly, to its subject. Marcus's travel report in the realm of pornography in nineteenth-century England has a kind of infectious verve; it is suave and stylish, and concludes with interesting chapters on the fictional world of what Marcus calls "Pornotopia." But in truth, *The Other Victorians* was written (as Charles Beard once said long ago about another book) without fear and without research. Its argument essentially rests on two dubious, not very credible witnesses: William Acton, a physician whose publications on prostitution and on the disorders of the sexual organs enjoyed an international vogue during the second half of the nineteenth century; and the anonymous author of an interminable, privately printed autobiography, *My Secret Life*. In paragraphs that Marcus recites at some length and that have been regularly rehearsed since then, Acton insisted that respectable women were sexually anesthetic. But for all his popularity among writers who found his style ingratiating and his opinions congenial, neither Acton's observations on female sexuality nor his moral preferences went unchallenged, nor were they even characteristic of his time. (This point has been brilliantly made by Carl N. Degler in "What Ought To Be and What Was: Women's Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," published in the *American Historical Review* in December 1974.) Acton's "writings," Marcus tells us, "may be said to represent the official view of sexuality held by Victorian society." Yet that is precisely what they may be said not to do.

As for the author of *My Secret Life*, however many details of social life one may pick up from his accounts of hot couplings with venal females, complaisant servants, and, later, inventive perverts, his adventures—whether lived or, as I suspect, largely imagined—tell us little about Victorian sexuality, and that little is bound to be misleading. In one breathtaking footnote, Marcus imagines the author of *My Secret Life* cruising the streets of London at night for an available female and meeting William Ewart Gladstone who, as everyone knows, walked the same streets to find prostitutes he might reform: "What an abyss would have opened between these two representatives of a single culture." But Gladstone, I would argue, with his oversized conscience and guilt-ridden erotic fantasies, the man who passionately loved his wife and was almost certainly faithful to her, is far more representative of his culture than the sexual athlete from whom Marcus constructs his caricature of Victorian erotic life. This is mythmaking or, rather, myth preserving.

In the last few years, scholars have begun to close in on the empty patches on the map of nineteenth-century erotic life. And in the work that remains to be done, our supplies of important raw materials, nineteenth-century writings on sex, are now being vastly increased by Arno Press's series entitled Sex, Marriage and Society that I mentioned earlier. Its advisory editors are Charles E. Rosenberg and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg. The books they have caused to be reprinted—for reasons that will emerge I prefer this clumsy locution to "edited"—are for the most part familiar to the specialist in the field. I have found in the

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last two years or so, in my work on nineteenth-century middle-class sexuality, that great libraries, like the Sterling and the Medical libraries at Yale, own practically all of the titles now being reprinted. But it is good to have them all together in this compact format, which will enable the private scholar or the small library (provided they are financially well endowed, for these volumes are inordinately expensive) to delve into long-obscure corners of Victorian erotic life, and to learn what respectable physicians and anxious pedagogues of the time were willing to say, and to print, about it.

The credentials of the advisory editors are impeccable. Charles E. Rosenberg has done distinguished work in the history of American science, broadly conceived, including nineteenth-century perceptions of sexuality. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has published a number of vigorous and original papers on passionate friendships between women and on sex as a symbol of purity. But in the enterprise of bringing out these thirty-odd titles—and more are to be published—their talents, far from being taxed, have hardly been engaged. For reasons the publisher can probably explain, they seem to have confined their labors to indicating the titles they want to see reprinted and, gathering some shorter pieces into collective volumes, to enclosing related publications between two covers. Only one of these books has an introduction by the editors, and that is only a perfunctory four pages long. None of the others, badly though they need it, offer biographical information; none are placed into any kind of social or cultural context. This is most unfortunate—a splendid opportunity wasted.

The production of these volumes is mediocre at best, sometimes vile. I will not dwell on the dead-white paper onto which the originals have been transferred. But at least in my set, a number of titles have been reproduced so imperfectly that page after page is, quite literally, unreadable. Unfortunately, this defect is most marked in some of the oldest books, such as that anonymous classic *Onania*, an immensely influential eighteenth-century diatribe against masturbation. But if my gratitude to editors and publisher is thus carefully circumscribed—and my disappointment is a measure of my high, though I think not unreasonable, expectations—I still salute their enterprise. At least the manifest content of nineteenth-century thinking on sex is gradually being collected and, especially in its English and American expressions, made accessible to a wider public.

As serious social historians, the editors have cast their net wide. The title of their series—Sex, Marriage and Society—is fair enough. It includes books of candid counsel to young ladies, like E. B. Duffey's *What Women Should Know: A Woman's Book About Women: Containing Practical Information for Wives and Mothers*; worried tracts combating coitus interruptus and related crimes against nature like Dr. Augustus K. Gardner's *Conjugal Sins Against the Laws of Life and Health*; celebrated documents of American social history, like the health reformer Sylvester Graham's much quoted *Lecture to Young Men*; translations from French experts who were no less alarmed by the pernicious effects of birth control than their American translators, like Dr. L. F. E. Bergeret's *The Preventive Obstacle, or Conjugal Onanism*; sentimental yet informative books of sexual advice to all, like Dr. J. H. Kellogg's bulky masterpiece, *Plain Facts for Old and Young: Embracing the Natural History and Hygiene of Organic Life*; sober and dignified reports on local prostitution to the mayors of Minneapolis and Philadelphia. And there are compendia like *The Secret Vice Exposed! Some Arguments Against Masturbation*, in which the editors group some short related tracts.

Varied as these books are, they share a curious mixture of genres. By 1900, when medicine, in alliance with the natural sciences, had reluctantly drifted toward specialization, the tone of publications on sexuality changed as well; it grew cooler, less emphatic, less moralistic—in short, more scientific. But from the early eighteenth century on, when such literature came to take its share of the reading public, down to the end of the nineteenth century, when writings on sex and marriage swelled to a flood, each work, whatever its announced purpose and particular concern, contained words of wisdom and words of warning. Writers on masturbation grew increasingly anxious with the passage of time until, after 1800, they predicted a disagreeable, painful, and ultimately fatal set of ailments for the unregenerate practitioner of

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"self-abuse" or "self-pollution," moving with ease from description to prescription, from dramatic case histories to lugubrious obituaries. And there was another closely related mixture, equally marked, of medicine and religion: physicians unhesitatingly invoked Christian credentials and adopted a tone more suitable (we would now think) to the pulpit than to the medical school auditorium. Conversely, preachers of all descriptions would adopt an avuncular bedside manner to which their academic degrees in theology scarcely entitled them. Nor was the precise status of authors always wholly clear; phrenologists, who had a respectable following at mid-century, would sometimes assume the title of doctor, without right but also without penalty.

The reasons for these heady confusions lay in the stresses of society in the grip of drastic, rapid, irreversible, and not wholly comprehensible changes. Life gave the authors little opportunity to cultivate and propagate the kind of detachment that is essential in scientific writing; and there was, or seemed to be, much ground for anxiety. The intense and ludicrous campaign against masturbation, of which this series contains some strident specimens, is instance and indicator of immense anxieties among those paid to be articulate and wise. Readers wanted to be preached at and to be informed and they did not care, by and large, whether the authority they were reading was a professional sermonizer or a professional physician. They wanted both in one volume, and normally that is just what they got.

The anonymously published *Satan in Society*. By a Physician (who has been identified as Nicholas Francis Cooke) is a particularly eloquent representative of this compound genre. What interests and worries the author most is masturbation, male and female. He devotes several of his early chapters to that dismal subject, warning against this "shameful and criminal act," which is "the most frequent, as well as the most fatal, of all vices." While the author hesitates to dwell on this "sickening revelation," he is convinced that false delicacy will only prevent the remedial action so desperately needed in schools and homes alike. He then proceeds to the physiology of marriage, draws psychological and physiological distinctions between the sexes, briefly addresses himself to the evil of prostitution, and launches into a concluding chapter on "happiness in wedlock"; his warnings may be grim, but he offers them for the sake of brighter days ahead. With "A Physician," as with a surprising number of other professional Jeremiahs in that earnest century, cheerfulness is always breaking in. Yet cheerful or not, religion receives its due; it pervades Cooke's message, and ends his book. The last aphorism among a handful of pithy sayings with which *Satan in Society* closes is, "The only recipe for permanent happiness in wedlock: Christianity."

Cheerfulness in fact punctuates the whole series. One optimistic title is *The Works of Aristotle, the Famous Philosopher*, an immensely popular handbook better known as *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, which brings together medical lore and sexual advice in palatable language redolent with the pleasures of intercourse. "Since the utmost intention of desire is required in this act," the author tells his palpitating public, "it may not be amiss for the bridegroom for the more eager heightening of this joy, to delineate the scene of their approaching happiness to his fair languishing bride in some such amorous rapture as this,

> Now, my fair bride, now will I storm the mint
> Of love and joy, and rifle all that's in't.
> Now my infranchis'd hand on every side,
> Shall o'er thy naked polish'd ivory slide,
> Freely shall now my longing eyes behold,
> Thy bared snow and thy undrained gold:
> Nor curtain now though of transparent lawn,
> Shall be before thy virgin treasure drawn.
> I will enjoy thee now, my fairest come,
> And fly with me to love's elysium,
> My rudder with thy bold hand, like a try'd
> And skillful pilot, thou shalt steer, and guide,
> My bark in love's dark channel, where it shall
> Dance, as the bounding waves do rise and fall.
> Whilst my tall pinnace in the Cyprian strait,
> Rides safe at anchor and unlades the freight. . . .

"Having by these and other amorous acts (which love can better dictate than my pen) wound up your fancies to the highest ardor, and desires,

> Perform those rights nature and love requires,
> Till you have quench'd each other's am'rous fires."

It will not do to overinterpret these mildly

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lascivious and distinctly minor verses, but they are notably consonant with the rest of the book, a book which retained its readers throughout the Victorian decades. And surprisingly enough to historians still imbued with the myths surrounding Victorian sexuality, the poem plainly suggests, first, that while a respectable girl would retain her virginity up to the marriage night, she would experience that night not as a trauma, but with healthy sexual curiosity and indeed activity—guiding her husband's rudder, boldly, to love's dark channel—and expecting precisely the same orgasmic pleasure from intercourse as her husband.

This cheerfulness, as I have called it, also informs other books of advice, such as Dr. Frederick Hollick's widely read *The Marriage Guide, or Natural History of Generation,* published in 1850, presumably the very heart of Victorian darkness. Hollick freely dispenses anatomical information complete with explicit diagrams, and advocates birth control. He devotes a whole chapter to what he calls the "Philosophy of Amative Indulgence," which begins, "Those who suppose that sexual enjoyment is altogether immoral and unworthy of rational beings, and those who regard it as a mere sensual gratification, are both in error." It is a natural instinct, beautified by sensible self-control and by love. And it is an instinct equal in men and women: "In both sexes, when the union is really desired, and no obstacle interferes, it leads to the highest and most absorbing excitement that animated beings can experience." There were many alarmists on the other side, to be sure, anticipating or echoing Acton's notion that women do not, and should not, feel sexual excitement and normally confine their passions to motherhood. But Hollick, a sought-after lecturer as well as a highly respected writer on sex, represents a far from negligible opinion in the Victorian decades.

With the series as we now have it, it is impossible to strike a fair balance between sexual repression and sexual freedom among the respectable in the nineteenth century. Nor will this be possible, it seems to me, even after it includes (as I hope it will) titles by such significant writers as Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell or Dr. George Napheys. For while the discussion on nineteenth-century sexuality has been carried on in these absolute terms—repression versus freedom—it seems far closer to the truth of the times to see writers, and their readers, ranged along a wide spectrum of opinion. Dr. James C. Jackson, for one, in his *The Sexual Organism and Its Healthful Management,* takes the scientific view that knowledge about sex is essential. "I have no apology to make for the discussion of this subject," he opens his book, unapologetically. "So important a part do the Sexual Organs play, in the maintenance of health, or in the development of disease, that I feel myself at liberty to talk to the people with entire freedom." His free exposition includes the development of the body, the phenomena of masturbation and nocturnal emission, and the uses of marriage. He has, in fact, a fairly relaxed attitude toward sexual intercourse: it is designed by nature for procreation, but if a couple desires pleasure alone, they can "be brought into sexual embrace without reaching the point of orgasmic action." This view, or rather complex of views, straddles a number of controversial positions. Dr. Jackson is relatively timid about the threat of self-abuse and quite bold about erotic activity for its own sake. And then there is Dr. Dio Lewis, who, in his *Chastity or, Our Secret Sins,* begins, as Dr. Jackson does, with a plea for knowledge—without which the people perish—and then continues, like Jackson, to issue warnings against self-indulgence, without, however, wholly denying the right of couples to enjoy sexual intercourse for the sake of sheer enjoyment. These authors, and others in the series, do not depart from conventional opinions about the habits of the body and the exigencies of sexual morality; in fact they codify them. But they recognize, at the same time, that the erotic urge is indefeasible and indefatigable, and must be managed, not extirpated.

The judgment that historians will offer about Victorian sexuality, then, is bound to be tentative and nuanced. We do not, of course, know enough, and fuller information may entitle us to more clear-cut verdicts—though I, for one, doubt that. Still, it will do no harm to learn more about the readers of these tracts and handbooks and treatises; we are almost wholly ignorant about what they did with the information, and the warnings, they absorbed. There are glimpses in diaries—many of which, I can testify, make

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fascinating reading—but much more needs to be done by scholars at once liberated from what I have called the Victorian myth and immune to the desire to revise for revision's sake.

This much, though, is plain now, and can be gleaned from the titles already represented in Sex, Marriage and Society: Victorians, in country after country, had a far more positive view of sexuality than has been supposed. They were often ambivalent; there were areas of ignorance and repression that helped to produce those symptoms for which Dr. George M. Beard would invent the name "neurasthenia." And there was an enormous gap between private conduct and public comment. It is this gap, indeed, that requires the historian's most thoughtful attention. Why such pressure for privacy? I have already noted that anxiety suffused that confident century—a century that was to invent, significantly enough, diagnostic terms for such disagreeable states of mind as alienation, nervousness, and anomie, and my researches suggest that anxiety drew the respectable into inventive stratagems of concealment. But anxiety was not all. To proclaim instant candor as normal and reticence as pathological would be to impose the uncertain (and in many ways unpleasant) ideals of the 1960s and 1970s on the world of a century ago, and hence to be unhistorical in the extreme. Our distance from the Victorian decades, which these books disclose and underscore over and over again, should free us to recognize their passion for privacy less as covering hypocrisy than as allowing space for civilized conduct. This, then, I think we can conclude with some confidence: it is a mistake to think that nineteenth-century bourgeois did not know what they did not discuss, did not practice what they did not confess, or did not enjoy what they did not publish.

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TEACHING

John Crowe Ransom

ANTHONY HECHT

I have never, except in childhood, belonged to a secret society, though I was to learn much about the thrills of initiation from *Tom Sawyer* and *War and Peace.* And if those novels had not supplied my needs, I might have divined a good deal one spring in New Haven, coming home with my wife from a party on the very night the Yale clubs had chosen to induct new members. There were the blindfolded postulants, robed in mortuary black, standing at well-spaced intervals, pale, mute, and submissive, occasionally moved to a new position along the street by wordless, solemn-faced members. The awe! The fatuity! And the whole soundless spectacle closely observed by a small group of black teenagers, children who would never go to Yale, much less be invited to join such an elite. I was, that evening, no more than an outside observer, certainly more like the black kids than like the members or inductees. But during one year of my life, in my early twenties, I was a sort of adjunct member of a group that was the more exclusive for having no formal shape or membership, its exclusions determined by instinct and a high destiny, like those that once characterized Calvinist New England. We few, we happy few, were English-major students of John Crowe Ransom at Kenyon College.

I was a special student, not a degree candidate, having already obtained my B.A. but feeling, after nearly three years in the army, by no means ready to take up graduate studies. It had been in the army, and from Robie Macauley, a fellow soldier and a Kenyon graduate who was later to take over the editorship of the *Kenyon Review,* that I first heard of Mr. Ransom. When at length I applied for admission on the GI Bill, it was Robie who suggested that it would assist my acquaintance with, and understanding of, Mr. Ransom if I read some of his work before heading for Ohio; and he especially recommended *The World's Body.* As an undergraduate I had read literary criticism—Eliot, Richards, Empson, Wilson, Winters, Blackmur—and I thought I knew generally what it was like in its best, as well as its most trying, features. Its aim was not only to be persuasive but definitive, and therefore its tone at times assumed the stiff and constipated grandeur of "objectivity." To have come to Mr. Ransom's prose with such expectations was to be completely undone. What was I to make of such paragraphs as these, from the preface to *The World's Body*?

> It is my impression that the serious critic should serve a sort of apprenticeship with his general principles. But the studies can scarcely afford to be pursued in any way except in the constant company of the actual poems. About ten years ago, when I did not know this, I wrote out and sent to a publisher a general aesthetic of poetry, a kind of Prologomena to Any Future Poetic, thinking that the public needed one, as perhaps it does. The intelligent publisher declined my project politely and returned my manuscript, which the other day I had the pleasure of consigning to the flames.
>
> But for the animating idea which informed my little effort of that time I have no repentance. I was concerned with urging that it is not a pre-scientific poetry but a post-scientific one to which we must now give our consent. I suppose I was rationalizing my own history, for I came late to an interest in poetry, after I had been stuffed with the law if not the letter of our modern sciences, and quickly I had the difficulty of finding a poetry which would not deny what we in our strange generation actually are: men who have aged in these

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pure intellectual disciplines, and cannot play innocent without feeling very foolish. The expense of poetry is greater than we will pay if it is something to engage in without our faculties. I could not discover that this mortification was required.

When T. S. Eliot, in his second Milton essay, begs of us that "it will, I hope, be attributed to me for modesty rather than for conceit if I maintain that no one can correct an error with better authority than the person who has been held responsible for it," we are led to expect an acknowledgment of error, but are to learn in due course and by splendid, sophistical devices that there has never been any error at all, that there has merely been a "person who has been held responsible" for one: poor, calumniated Mr. Eliot. In telling us in Milton I that it was dangerous and "unwholesome" to read Milton, and in reversing himself twenty-five years later in Milton II, he tells us he was *right in both cases*—like the physician who first takes you off and then puts you back on carbohydrates. And we are asked to attribute this revelation to Mr. Eliot's modesty. Educated as I was in defensive strategies of this sort, I found the genuine modesty of Mr. Ransom's paragraphs startling. It was more than merely the candor of the anecdote about burning his manuscript; it was the unassuming personableness of his prose. For the word "impression" in the first sentence virtually any other critic I had read would have inserted "assertion" if he had dared; the courtly, hyperbolic, and ironic charm of "I could not discover that this mortification was required" allowed a subtle, recognizably personal voice—gallant, old-fashioned, deliberate, witty, self-mocking, and generous—to appear right there on the page where I had come to expect nothing but inexorable proofs or ex cathedra declarations. My first reaction was to wonder whether such stuff could possibly go into the making of literary criticism. Over the years it has been my growing impression (you see how valuable such influences can be) that Mr. Ransom's prose most nearly resembles the prose of George Santayana in its rhythmic and rhetorical elegances, its quirky delight in the unexpected word, its worldly and polished skepticism, and its warmth of spirit. I never met Santayana, but these traits were native to Mr. Ransom in person as in print.

To have become one of that little group of Kenyon students in the mid-forties was not merely to have joined them under Mr. Ransom's remarkable tuition; it was also to have been assimilated into a hieratic tradition, a select branch in the great taxonomic structure of the modern intellect, in which we were the direct and undisputed heirs not only of Mr. Ransom himself but of all our distinguished predecessors who were his former pupils. These ranged from legendary young men of stunning mental powers who had graduated just too soon for any of us to have met them (about one of them it was affirmed that he wandered the campus reading extremely difficult texts in philosophy from which he tore out the pages and threw them away after a single, hasty, but sufficient perusal) to such as Peter Taylor and Robert Lowell, who were just coming into their fame, and beyond them to Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, and Robert Penn Warren, who had discernibly changed the course and character of American letters. We were aware that Mr. Warren's nickname was "Red," and took the liberty of so referring to him. The responsibility of following in so august a procession we regarded as a difficult historic burden, just sufficiently mitigated by our private sense of being among "the anointed."

Let it be said at once that Mr. Ransom was altogether innocent, as well as ignorant, of our fatuities. Even had he known about them, his natural courtesy would probably have forbidden him to notice them. He was, I believe, the most courteous man I have ever known, and not a little of what I learned from him I learned through his supreme and kindly tact in ignoring my follies. Mr. Ransom's silences and omissions of comment were triumphs of educative eloquence, and no small part of their triumph lay in the fact that, like his verbalized comment, they were never allowed to wound if that extremity could be prevented. I'm sure such prevention was not always possible. We were all either secret or confessed poets—as well, of course, as being close readers, exegetes, speculative aestheticians, and literary ontologists. And Mr. Ransom found himself exposed to our compositions from time to time. He had no formula for dealing with our ineptitudes, but he had a little arsenal of critical words of great subtlety that

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must often have stood him in good stead. Of these, one of the most powerful was the word "bold," usually incorporated in the phrase "that's mighty bold," applied either to an entire poem or some central detail or metaphor in it. A young poet, hearing Mr. Ransom comment thus upon his work, might easily feel that his poem exhibited a breathtaking and unprecedented originality of so striking a sort as to reorder the whole tradition of Western literature—as Eliot suggested in a famous essay when he wrote, "What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them." Naturally such newness, such novelty, such flying in the face of established expectations and received procedures required a rash intrepidity, a last-ditch faith in oneself and one's own poetic instincts upon which all poets must surely rely in the end. Still, it often happened that, late in the afternoon after an audience with Mr. Ransom in which he had pronounced on the boldness of some poem, and after the understandable euphoria had abated, one came to realize that a possible meaning of "bold" might be "impudent," and that one's work might be not so much a reordering of the great tradition as an affront to it.

He was rather short in stature, and when I came to know him, in his late fifties, his hair was already white as swansdown. When the first warmth of spring arrived in Gambier, Mr. Ransom would sometimes turn out in a powder blue sports jacket, socks, with white clocks in them, to match, and white shoes. He was by no means a dandy, but he was a dapper and sprightly dresser. He was also a pipe smoker, but used a rather sweet-smelling, aromatic tobacco such as I suspect a true smoker would find lacking in seriousness, though it could not fail to be agreeable to those around him. As part of his smoking paraphernalia Mr. Ransom always carried with him in his right-hand trouser pocket a thick clutch, a sort of beaver dam, of strike-anywhere kitchen matches. It seemed to me that some grace or special providence never allowed these matches to ignite as they constantly rubbed against one another in that pocket. But I was often anxious in his behalf. He had an especially beautiful and gently modulated tenor voice, with the special delicacy of his regional southern speech to which he brought a lilt of his own, characterized by a tendency to end his sentences on a rising inflection, as though they were more questions than statements, and conveying thereby a considerate tentativeness. This highly personal, idiosyncratic, and musical mode of speech he employed in normal discourse and in reading his own poems. And we, his students, vied with each other in imitating Mr. Ransom's readings—especially of "Captain Carpenter." There was something wonderfully incongruous about the gentleness of Mr. Ransom's voice and the martial bluster of that poem.

His effect in class was naturally colored by the singularity of that voice. His class behavior is difficult to describe except to say that I first mistook it for diffidence. Mr. Ransom did not lecture, he inquired; and he invited the class to join in his inquiry. This was nothing so symmetrical, so antiphonal, as a Socratic dialogue; nor as manifestly stacked in favor of the teacher. Neither can I remember his uttering any memorable pronouncements, nor can I point with accuracy to a particular thing I learned in my studies with him. But I soon began to see that what I had first taken for diffidence was his firm and principled refusal to usurp our interests from the primary position of the poetic text under consideration. He had neither the need nor the inclination to exhibit himself, to parade his learning or his perspicuity. With characteristic generosity he was curious enough about us to suppose that we might, any one of us, discover something in the text that had escaped his notice. He was almost always disappointed in that hope, but it had the healthy pedagogical effect of inviting us to be diligent, cautious, and thoughtful.

Mr. Ransom was exceedingly fond of games, and in recalling this fact about him I am struck by the recollection that Frost, Wilbur, and Auden all found in game-language apt and useful metaphors for the art of poetry. More striking still is the fact that in the first chapter of that highly suggestive work, *Homo Ludens,* the great Dutch historian Johan Huizinga describes play and games in terms no reader of Ransomian critical prose could fail at once to recognize.

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Play is superfluous. It is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty. It is voluntary, free. It is disinterested.

It stands outside the immediate satisfactions of wants and appetites, indeed it interrupts the appetitive process. . . . It thus has a place in a sphere superior to the strictly biological processes of nutrition, reproduction and self-preservation.

It contains its own course and meaning.

It at once assumes fixed form as a cultural phenomenon. Once played, it endures as a new-found creation of the mind, a treasure to be retained in memory. It is transmitted, it becomes tradition.

All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the "consecrated spot" cannot be formally distinguished from the playground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis-court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function playgrounds, i.e., forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain.

It creates order, *is* order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and supreme. . . . The profound affinity between play and order is perhaps the reason why play . . . seems to lie to such a large extent in the field of aesthetics. . . . It is invested with the noblest qualities we are capable of perceiving in things: rhythm and harmony.

It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it.

This final observation, as applied not to games but to poetry, would not signify in Mr. Ransom's understanding any sardonic comment on the social and economic status of the poet in the modern world, but simply would indicate the absolute non-utility of the poetic object.

At the time I knew him, Mr. Ransom was an avid baseball fan, an insatiable player of bridge, and if there was any fierceness at all in his character he was said to have expressed it in his playing of croquet. But I best remember being invited with other students to his home on a number of occasions to play a game then classically known as *The Game*, but more commonly called "charades." I remember it best because I was once forced into the humiliating admission that I could think of no way of representing some small, transitional word, some preposition or conjunction in the phrase or sentence that had fallen to my lot to enact. In an altogether unassuming way, without a hint of the pedagogue about him, Mr. Ransom briefly indicated that the categories of grammar perfectly expressed the names, nature, behavior, and relationship of things as they exist in the actual world. This correspondence had never occurred to me before. And for quite some time afterward I was astonished to think of the parts of speech as the very ligaments and sinews of the world itself.

At first I did not know what to make of his poems—their arrant archaisms, sophistications, and opulent latinities that contrasted with such shameless, nursery-rhyme simplicities as:

> To me this has its worth
> As I sit upon the earth

An early taste for the witty lyrics of Cole Porter and Noel Coward had persuaded me that rhymes, like poems themselves, should seek to be original and in any case avoid the obvious, unless in parody. What was I to make of the phrase "dainty youths," for God's sake, in a twentieth-century poem that had no homosexual or "campy" intentions? One had to come to terms with such oddities if one was not to stint or mitigate one's loyalty. But of course it was always possible to point with delight and gratitude and, if necessary, with defiance, at *the real thing:*

> The larks' tongues are never stilled
> Where the pale spread straw of sunlight lies.

To follow those matchless lines with the remorseless abstractions of the next two . . .

> Then what invidious gods have willed
> Him to be seized so otherwise?

. . . at first seemed to me an exercise in perversity, but gradually came to be seen as poetry of high rhetorical flourish.

All of us in that little group grew to be very touchy about Mr. Ransom's fame and reputation, and this may have been partly due to the smallness and isolation of Gambier. One could so easily step off Kenyon's hill and out of the loftiness of its halls into the quite unliterary cornfields and cow pastures of ru-

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ral Ohio, that "other Thrace." We appointed ourselves Mr. Ransom's champions, of which he was mercifully unaware. He had, of course, no need of us, even though we thought he did when some particularly obtuse or literal-minded critic ventured to take him to task. To this day the memory rankles of an especially foolish lady who once remarked to me that she found the lines about the cries of the geese in "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter" sticky with tasteless sentiment:

> Her wars were bruited in our high window.
> We looked among orchard trees and beyond
> Where she took arms against her shadow,
> Or harried unto the pond
>
> The lazy geese, like a snow cloud
> Dripping their snow on the green grass,
> Tricking and stopping, sleepy and proud,
> Who cried in goose, Alas,
>
> For the tireless heart within the little
> Lady with rod that made them rise
> From their noon apple-dreams and scuttle
> Goose-fashion under the skies!

She thought it too adorably cute that there should be a "goose word" which was the equivalent of "Alas," and she seemed to suppose that the "Alas" was the complaint of the geese at being disturbed from "their noon apple-dreams," and herded and marched so vigorously about. She was totally unaware that all the regret in that "Alas" was not for the geese themselves but for the young girl, "For the tireless heart within the little / Lady" which was not due to beat for very much longer. And the geese knew this because geese are prophetic creatures. Their cries once awakened the soldiery of Rome at a moment when the invasion of barbarian hordes was imminent, decisively saving the city and civilization itself. Their divinatory faculties were ever after remembered with honor, at least until my interlocutor brought up the subject. On that occasion I ventured not a word in the poem's defense, and she may to this day rejoice in her faulty and trivial sense of it.

I find it very difficult, in retrospect, to say exactly what it was one learned from Mr. Ransom, to point to particular notions or propositions. One found it possible, and sometimes necessary, to disagree with him—private, interior disagreements about details in the interpretation of poems, even of general philosophic premises—without losing any respect for him by such silent dissent. For what one learned from him were not facts or positions but a posture of the mind and spirit, a humanity and courtesy, a manly considerateness that inhabited his work as it did his person. And one learned to pay keen attention to poetic detail. Probably there were those moments when he indicated to us a truth so simple and profound that it seemed not so much to be his own statement as the sudden objective appearance of the truth itself, independent of its utterer—a truth so elemental and undeniable as to resemble the statement reported by Kenneth Clark in *Landscape into Art:* "Constable said that the best lesson on art he ever had was contained in the words, 'Remember, light and shadow never stand still.' " All the flux of history and Heraclitus, the tale of Demeter and Persephone, our jubilant triumphs and inconsolable defeats are figured in that anonymous advice.

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At Summer's End

SAUL HILLEL BENJAMIN

Months of waiting: then everyone
clamoring down the hill
to the orchard for its meats.
Winter long, rooted
snug in bed with books

up to our armpits, we plotted
summer's populations:
the musty peach, the sex
of pears; the sorbs and apples.
Amulets for our mouths to dream.

Differences are what count.
I can tell by the actual thump
whether it's an apple
or a sorb that's hit the path
or the soft or hard ground.

Apples recite: delicious, sweet.
Sorbs are blunt.
Some of us need ladders,
but others have only
to reach for what they need.

Lowest branches deliver up
their goods with least objection.
But even topmost fruits fall down
to mumble from our wooden crates.
Delicious bitter, delicious red.

Then falling light: the mind at war.
In search of what we might become,
we strip the summer down to seed,
and lug our thievings up the hill:
we steal what we already own.

✪ SAUL HILLEL BENJAMIN, who is on leave from the faculty of St. John's College, Annapolis, is a Danforth Fellow at Oxford University.

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The Buck Stopped Here

Letter from a High School English Teachers' Convention

JAY AMBERG

We high school English teachers have been told that we are not doing our job very well. We have been told by parents that we have failed to teach the basics, by school boards that we must be accountable, by purveyors of standardized tests that our students are not scoring high enough, by journalists that Johnny can't read or write anymore, and by English professors—this is the unkindest cut of all—that we are sending them a generation of students who are illiterate and ill equipped for college. As a result of all we have been told, we have, understandably, become defensive and more than a touch surly. While spending a week with other high school English teachers in San Francisco, the site of the most recent National Council of Teachers of English convention, I found myself escaping periodically from the sessions and heading for Fisherman's Wharf. There I could mingle with the tourists, indulge in a midwesterner's hunger for fresh seafood, listen to a one-man band, eye the sea gulls eyeing my crab-and-prawn cocktail, and think about teachers of English, about what was being said in the convention meetings, and particularly about the teaching of writing—the subject of much of the recent public squabbling.

Most of the news from the convention was less than cheery: speakers too often generalized or lapsed into jargon or did both; panelists too often failed to speak to the issues at hand; and almost everyone seemed to embrace a panacea for the problems in the profession. Grasping for panaceas is, I believe, a prime characteristic of English teachers' conventions. During the past two decades, structural grammar, team teaching, transformational grammar, behavioral objectives, programmed texts, basic texts, and paperback books have, among other things, been touted as miracle cures for what ails the profession.

This year's panacea is something called sentence combining—a transformational grammar–based activity purported to teach students to write sophisticated prose, or, as its proponents say, "to attain syntactic fluency." Numerous sessions were given over to sentence combining, and sentence combining was a merit badge of sorts among some teachers. While standing in the lobby of the St. Francis Hotel, I overheard one teacher remark to another, "I began sentence combining last year, you know." "Well, dear," came the retort, "*I did it in '77.*" When combining sentences, a student attempts to transform a series of "kernel" sentences into one complicated sentence. In each exercise, a student might combine as many as seventy kernels into a dozen or so "mature syntactic structures," or complex sentences. In William Strong's text, *Sentence Combining*, for example, one exercise entitled "Operation Breadbasket" includes as kernels 57–62 the following:

It has helped products.
The products are many.
The products are black.
The products are to be sold.
The selling is in stores.
The stores did not carry the products before.

The wily sentence combiner would transform these kernels into: "It has helped many black

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products to be sold in stores which did not carry the products before," or something similar.

The problem with using sentence combining exercises is that they are not an adequate substitute for actual writing. When combining sentences in an exercise a student is not composing sentences. In fact, the exercises do not include real sentences at all. True, the kernels are technically sentences, but, as one notices immediately in the example above, the kernels are so simplistic and simpleminded that no one over the age of four would use them in conversation or in writing. When a student of any age begins to write something, he simply does not think about syntactic fluency or combining sentences—to do so would likely cause delirium. Rather he thinks about what he is going to say. Or at least he should.

Sentence combining does have a limited usefulness when one is teaching students to rewrite and edit their prose. Some of the high school students I teach often tend to think complex thoughts but write simple sentences. These students do benefit from learning to combine their sentences while editing their writing. And, I suppose, within this context, a sentence-combining exercise or two approached as a sort of pregame limbering up —calisthenics for writers—wouldn't hurt. Having students work through an entire book of sentence-combining exercises, however, makes as much sense as continuing calisthenics for an entire season and never playing the game.

The fact that sentence combining has been touted as a panacea at all sheds light on how educational innovation works, at least in relation to the teaching of language. In 1957 Noam Chomsky published *Syntactic Structures*, a monograph explaining sentence transforms and transformational grammar. Proponents of Chomsky's theory declared that a grammatical revolution had begun, but the students who subsequently studied transformational grammar became even more confused than when they had studied traditional grammar. In 1964 John C. Mellon published *A Grammar for English Sentences*, a course textbook for transformational grammar which was based largely on Chomsky's theory that English sentences consisted of kernels plus phrases to be "embedded" in those kernels. Laden with jargon (one section of the grammar is entitled "Insertion Transformations for Complement-type Sentences," and another "Multiple and Recursive Complex Transformations"), Mellon's text tended to sink before even well-meaning and earnest students. The text did, though, present a number of sentence-combining exercises among the theoretical assertions and grammatical rules.

In 1973 Frank O'Hare published a research report entitled *Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction.* In his experiment, O'Hare stripped sentence combining of some of its elaborate jargon and made the exercises more sophisticated and even rather cute. More wooden than leaden, the exercises still sank after a couple of days in the classroom. William Strong's recently published *Sentence Combining*, the text cited above, presents exercises without any of the transformational jargon. These exercises certainly sail more easily with students, but their value is, as I say, questionable. What will happen next? Stephen Judy, the editor of the *English Journal* (the National Council of Teachers of English secondary-school periodical), has the dubious honor of keeping tabs on this sort of phenomenon, and he gives sentence combining two or three years before it is played out and replaced by a fresh panacea.

In the past quarter of a century, then, a new grammatical theory has been proposed. Heralded as revolutionary by some educators, when used in classrooms the theory sank as quickly as—if not faster than—traditional grammatical theory. Undaunted, proponents developed course texts based on the theory. Top-heavy with jargon, these texts turned turtle in the classroom. Then, as the jargon was jettisoned from the texts, the exercises without the theory were again heralded by some educators—and again began to ship water after limited use in classrooms. Soon, most likely, the exercises will begin to fade into the fog from which they came. So much for educational innovation.

I wish that the bad news from the San Francisco convention was limited to yet another unworkable panacea. But the problems run much deeper. When around large numbers of English teachers for any length of time, one begins to get a vague feeling that something is amiss. One begins to sense what

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teachers themselves call a "bad attitude." What exactly is amiss in the profession began to crystallize for me during a session with the snappy title of "Retraining Teachers of English Language Arts to Work with New Clienteles." One speaker moaned, "People have the idea that English teachers can't do anything—that we can't possibly know anything of practical value." Certainly some people still hold H. L. Mencken's stricture of a half-century ago: "I have maintained for years, perhaps sometimes with undue heat: that pedagogy in the United States is fast descending to the estate of childish necromancy, and that the worst idiots, even among pedagogues, are the teachers of English." Those who feel this way do the profession ill, but what was more disheartening at the convention was that many English teachers seemed themselves to hold Mencken's view. As a profession, we do not know what it means to be professional, or even, it sometimes seems, if we want to be considered professional by others. If teachers of English have an enemy today, it is not those outside the profession who disdain us; it is rather—as Joseph Conrad and William Golding and John Knowles and even Pogo have said—ourselves.

The professional confusion among English teachers manifests itself in a misunderstanding about whom we serve and a misconception—or perhaps a forgetfulness—about what it is we are paid to do. English teachers are, of course, paid to teach students to read and write; our job is, although we sometimes forget it, that simple. There are many ways to teach reading and writing, but this much is certain: if we read and write ourselves, we are more likely to do a better job of teaching those skills to others. Unfortunately, many English teachers read only a little and write not at all. Last summer I participated in a writing seminar for English teachers, during which I had the pleasure of reading other teachers' writing and listening to them talk about how they themselves composed prose. One participant, a high school department chairman, wrote an exquisitely detailed piece about his "Victorian childhood" in a rural town in Iowa. When discussing the piece, he said that he had had trouble with it, that he wasn't sure if it was good because he hadn't written much in recent years. Then he admitted that he had written the entire piece in a night. When he sat down to write it, the words came to him and he could not sleep until he had worked and reworked the piece.

Two things became clear to me at the moment of his admission: that he wrote better than many professional writers and that he did not see his own writing as something of real value—something which could be usefully shared with his students. Rather than trusting his ability to write and to talk with students about writing, he complained after the seminar was over that little of what we had done had any bearing on what he might do in his classroom in the fall. This teacher's confusion is, I suspect, the rule among English teachers rather than the exception. Perhaps it is true that the only thing that English teachers can do is read and write and share their understanding of reading and writing with others. But the practical value of this, so self-evident, is almost always overlooked.

As for the question of who it is that they serve, high school English teachers readily agree that their clients are students and their parents and, when pressed, grudgingly admit that school boards are their clients as well. But the public interest in literacy over the past few years suggests that our clientele is more inclusive than this. Because literacy and literate people are our products, our clientele probably includes news commentators and writers, government officials and businessmen, and certainly college professors, especially professors of English, who are most often the direct recipients of our products. In recent years the professors have complained, sometimes vociferously, that they have been receiving damaged goods. Although this criticism is not completely justified, it is understandable in the light of the inability of high school teachers to recognize that what is done in our classrooms has a direct effect on what the professors can and cannot do in theirs.

The chief complaint of professors is that freshmen are arriving at college uneducated, indeed practically illiterate. The professors are more than half right—by definition a college freshman, even one who can read and write passably, is uneducated. The phrase "practically illiterate" is more vexing, but let at least this much be admitted: college freshmen do not write as well as they should. Why

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is this so? The professors' ready answer would likely be that it is because high school English teachers no longer teach students anything. Stephen Judy, who works closely with high school teachers and college professors, says, "The common complaint I hear on campus is that grammar is not taught in schools and all secondary school writing is self-expression only." This simply is not the case. There is very little expressive writing taught in schools; the sort of writing most often taught is expository writing. And at least in my school, where a language fundamentals course is now the most heavily enrolled elective, grammar is being taught more than at any time in recent decades.

The probable truth of the matter is that high school students today are being taught literacy as well as students ever were. We tend to miss this point because we notice things happening in our society and in the schools which we assume are a detriment to literacy: fewer students are reading the Bible and other good books; fewer students are learning Latin; and many, if not most, students are wasting hours of every day watching television and listening to records. No doubt these trends make the teaching of literacy—and particularly of writing—difficult, but it has always been a difficult endeavor, and the results have always been spotty. The literacy crisis has been with us for decades, professors have complained about the writing skills of freshmen for more than a century, and, for at least that long, English teachers, feeling beleaguered by the criticism, have reacted defensively. At the first National Council of Teachers of English convention in Chicago in 1911, Edwin L. Miller proffered an observation that one could almost hear echoing through the sessions in San Francisco.

> Ever since I began to teach English, eighteen or twenty years ago, I have heard English teachers abused because they did not get satisfactory results. Most of these criticisms came from young college professors and from old businessmen, and as I, at that time, had great respect for both classes, I thought probably that our failure was due to our stupidity. I have come in late years to a different conclusion.

Miller's conclusion, not surprisingly, was that the assumption by their critics that English teachers are solely responsible for the teaching of literacy is not merely false but wholly absurd.

What exactly Miller had heard as a young teacher in the early 1890s we cannot know, but the 1892 Report of the Committee on Composition and Rhetoric of the Harvard College Board of Overseers may well be typical. The report concluded, in part:

> It would not seem unreasonable to insist that young men of nineteen years of age who present themselves, for a college education, should be able not only to speak, but to write their mother tongue with ease and correctness.

We cannot know how, in turn, English teachers reacted to the Harvard report, or even if they were familiar with it, for high school English teachers had no professional journal at that time. One suspects, however, that the answer, like Miller's, would have been a bit defensive: that, yes, given the fact that the entire burden of teaching literacy is placed on English teachers and only a limited amount of time in schools is allowed for that teaching, it is quite unreasonable to insist that all—or even most—young men of nineteen be able to write with ease and correctness.

In making such a statement, the teachers would have been admitting, at least implicitly, that they could not meet the academic standards of European secondary schools, especially the British public schools. Committed to democratic education, American public school teachers, particularly teachers of English, suffered from the comparison of their product to that of the British schools—a comparison which held the teachers hostage to mutually exclusive assumptions: that all children can and should be taught and that teaching can and should produce uniformly excellent results. Whatever the teachers' comments would have been in the 1890s, the first issue of the *English Journal*, in January 1912, carried as its lead article a piece entitled "Can Good Composition Teaching Be Done Under Present Conditions?" by Edwin M. Hopkins. After surveying the amount of work required of composition teachers and the grand expectations made of these teachers by others, Hopkins's answer to his own question was a simple and direct no.

A decade later the issues were unchanged, the lines still as firmly drawn. In 1924, Dr.

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Thomas Blaisdell, in his presidential address to the National Council of Teachers of English, admitted that literacy, though uniformly taught, was not uniformly being learned—even in college.

> Few of the men and women graduated within a month from our colleges can write a creditable business letter. Only an exceptional one can interest an audience for ten minutes as he talks about a familiar subject. Not many have the habit of reading anything except the sports page.

Writing in 1925, Charles H. Ward was even less subtle about the problem of literacy and more cogent about the dilemma facing teachers of English. His words sound as though they were written in the mid-1970s rather than a half-century earlier.

> Nowadays the cry goes up from every college in the land, "Our freshmen can't spell, can't punctuate." Every high school is worried because so many students are ignorant of rudiments. A reformation is everywhere demanded. It is being brought about, and so rapidly that most textbooks are stranded in the idealism of a decade earlier, and many teachers are floundering badly in the new conditions. It is hard to keep pace with the swift change, hard to know what it is all about.

The demanded reformation was rapidly brought about, but did not produce more literate students than had the earlier idealism. The spiral of criticism about the teaching of literacy and English teachers' defensiveness about that criticism has, however, wound down through the decades unabated to the present. Each generation of critics, too busy to look carefully at history, has become convinced that a new crisis is upon us and has yearned openly for an idyllic past in which students frolicked beatifically in literary fields. Unfortunately this past has never existed.

If the literacy crisis is nothing new, if the teaching of literacy has, through all the educational trends and panaceas of the last century, never produced students of a uniformly high literacy, we are left with but one feasible conclusion: high school graduates (and college graduates, for that matter) do not write as well as they should because writing is difficult to teach and even harder to learn. Teaching students to write *is* hard work; it is always difficult and time consuming, and often frustrating. I should guess that my own experience is fairly typical. In the fall semester of last year I taught writing to five classes of high school juniors and seniors. During the semester I read approximately fifteen hundred papers; I met with 125 students five days a week. Some of the students improved remarkably; others showed scant improvement from first paper to last. The only conclusion I could draw at the end of the semester was that the teaching of writing is, at least partly, a mysterious business. When one teaches writing, a complex act no one fully understands, one is inevitably going to get results as varied as the students in the class.

I do not mean to imply here that writing is an entirely mystical act or that the teaching of writing is fruitless. Quite the contrary. Students can be taught to gather their thoughts, to plan their papers, to revise, and to proofread—all of which, in most cases, improves their papers. They can also be taught mechanics—although, I hasten to point out, some students remain immune to correct English no matter how often they are exposed to it, others learn the rules of grammar without then being able to apply those rules to their own writing, while still others write grammatically correct English without knowing much formal grammar. In the specific case of expository writing, students can also be taught certain principles of composition like the use of topic sentences and transitions (or "connectives," depending upon one's jargon). But clear writing requires the ability to think logically and to use language fluently—attributes of intellectual maturity not always found among educated adults. As for style—the full development of a literary sensibility—this comes slowly at best, generally over a period of years. Learning to write does not arbitrarily end when a student graduates from high school.

Writing should, then, be taught at every level of American education. This is true—indeed, especially true—for colleges and graduate schools. The teaching of writing should also, as a number of experts have already pointed out, involve teachers of all subjects at all levels. Using language well is central to all education, and all educators ought to share in teaching it to students. At the very least all university English teachers, particularly those

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who are most highly trained in the literature of the language, should be expected to share in the responsibility for the teaching of writing.

But let me climb down from my soapbox and return to news of the convention in San Francisco, where a few hopeful signs about the teaching of English emerged. I found three of the sessions downright reassuring. There was one in which the speaker used examples of student writing to talk wonderfully well about teaching students to write. There was a session about something called the Bay Area Writing Project, a workshop program which attempts to overcome the problems one naturally associates with anything called a "project" or "workshop." (Everything that has gone wrong with the world since World War II, Kingsley Amis has said, can be summed up in the word "workshop.") And a third session given by Ken Macrorie, a devoted teacher who spoke of teaching in an English devoid of cant and hype, was a salutary reminder of why we all chose to teach English to begin with. Each of these sessions was encouraging, but in subtle ways which would likely be all but indiscernible to anyone who is not an English teacher. It is difficult to explain to anyone who has not tried teaching students to write why it is exciting to hear examples of good student writing; or explain to anyone who has not suffered withdrawal from one-shot affairs given by visiting firemen why it is heartening to hear about the Bay Area Writing Project's continuing programs; or even explain to someone who has not sat through interminable sessions on "tagmemics" or some other folderol why it is refreshing to hear plain English.

On balance, then, what can be said negatively about the teaching of English is far more salient than what can be said positively. But this I suspect will always be the case. English teachers can never hope to promise any startling "breakthrough" in the teaching of literacy. Those students who leave high school illiterate will continue to get more attention than those who leave literate. Despite all of the elements in our society which undermine literacy, some people will continue to assume that teaching the young to be literate is relatively simple. Although English teachers know firsthand that this is not so, many among us will continue to reach out for panaceas in the hope that teaching literacy will become easy. High school English teachers would do better to admit that those who learn to read and write do so only by reading and writing—and then get back to the business of having their students do just that.

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Books

On the Sleuth of Slobodka and the Cortez of Kabbalah

JUDAH GOLDIN

WOLFSON OF HARVARD. *By Leo W. Schwarz. The Jewish Publication Society of America. $10.95.*

Gershom G. Scholem, in his *T.L.S.* review of this volume, has characterized the genre correctly: "Biographies of scholars are a category to themselves . . . so many of them have a certain aura of sweet boredom and appeal to nobody but their closest colleagues and pupils." In other words, they are specimens of what might be called *mi she-berakh* composition—synagogue proclamations in approval of the (monetary) contributions of individuals called to ascend and recite blessings over the Scroll of the Law. Did so-and-so make his money or inherit it? The answer is irrelevant, as is the next question: Why doesn't he get along with his partner? Only the inquisitive pay attention, in order to be able to gossip later about the size of the promised gift. Most of the congregation are too bored to be curious.

While it is not unfair to say this about most of the biographical essays on modern Jewish scholars, to leave the impression that Leo W. Schwarz's volume is also a bore would be an injustice for at least three reasons. First, he writes a clean and gracious English prose (contrast, for example, the biographical essays on the late Louis Ginzberg and Alexander Marx in their respective jubilee volumes). Second, although Schwarz is writing for a reading audience not primarily scholars and students of philosophy—or, to put it bluntly, writing a popular book—he does not vulgarize; he does not adopt the condescending or insulting attitude that the material to be described or discussed should be either skipped or prechewed to baby-food consistency for the digestion of the simpleminded. Schwarz is dealing with the serious work of a leading historian of philosophy and his unique methodology of analysis. Not once but several times he goes to the trouble of making the man, his raw material, and his craftsmanship comprehensible to the general reader—one who may not be a student of philosophy but reads to learn. Gershom Scholem's parenthetical reservation in ". . . Leo Schwarz describes [Wolfson's method] in much (too much?) detail in several of his central chapters" is itself testimony to the biographer's seriousness. How much is too much? We're back to *de gustibus*.

Third, like every biographer, Leo Schwarz gives himself away as he speaks about his subject. Clearly he is filled with reverence for his master; his very decision to do a biography of Wolfson is both report and commentary on the Wolfson spell. And the question we must answer is, Why? What was there about Wolfson that proved so irresistible, not only to Leo Schwarz but to a large number of Jewish men at Harvard (and apparently to a number of non-Jewish ones too)? Despite the exemplary luminousness of Wolfson's prose (more anon), to his dying day Wolfson spoke English with a thick Yiddish accent; you'd have expected that the Harvard Jew of the twenties would have been repelled by it, since the twenties were no easy time for Jews in the Ivy League. The manner of his lecturing was anything but theatrical. He was an attractive lecturer but was completely free of the tricks of overdramatization. He taught

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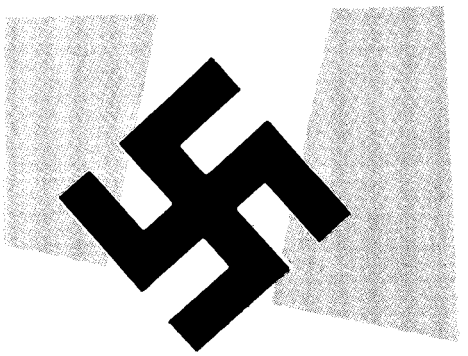

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Jewish history even before he had a textbook to recommend, and he adopted the Margolis and Marx volume when it appeared—as though that solid, trustworthy, and slumber-inducing chronicle could contribute to increasing interest! But why should a bright Jewish boy at Harvard in the twenties ("Hooray, I got in!") study Jewish history? Of what use was it? How could it help you get admitted to medical school, hard enough to get into as it was (some WASPs also didn't make it). And if your interest was in philosophy, why not concentrate on the Greats—the pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza (really?), Hume, and so forth? Who is this Crescas and what difference does it make? Besides, if you're looking for something beautiful to read, have you seen Mr. Santayana's recent volume?

To all these questions, and others like them, there was fundamentally only one answer: Wolfson seduced you by his overwhelming intellectual power. He had wit, to be sure, and he did not shun irony. But these were subsidiary to his astonishing learning and rare analytic-and-imaginative intellect: from text to hypothesis and from hypothesis to reconstruction, and then bolstering by accurate information and good judgment. Students overcame their initial reluctance because he came at them not with fractional or fustian argumentation but with comprehensive and systematic exposition. He was full of thought and he had style. A number of the excerpts quoted by Schwarz could serve as illustrations. Let two suffice; they reveal the pace, the unhurried surefootedness of Wolfson making a point.

The following is from *The Philosophy of Spinoza:*

When Aristotle reduced all the changes that come under our observation to four kinds of motion, and further reduced these four kinds of motion to locomotion, and then traced this locomotion to the prime mover which was itself immovable, he established systematically the principle of the uniformity of the laws of nature. Later, with the identification of the God of Scriptural tradition with this prime mover, God became a cognomen of the universal laws of nature and the source of their uniformity. Indeed, God still continued to be spoken of as governor and ruler, and still continued to be described as most powerful, but He was shorn of that arbitrariness which was His characteristic as a primitive deity. He became now a constitutional monarch, whose powers were limited by the laws of His own nature, unable to change the nature and behavior of things which He himself had laid down from eternity. . . . But the constitution by which according to the rationalist theologians God had limited His own power was only partly written and known to us. A great part of it was unwritten and unknown to us, and therefore by certain prerogatives retained by Him God could do many things which according to our way of thinking would seem to be arbitrary and a subversion of what we consider the laws of nature. Thus to them it was conceivable that God . . . could perform all kinds of miracles. The [inconsistency of such belief] with the conception of God as a constitutional monarch limited by eternal and immutable laws [was] generally recognized, widely discussed, and somehow reconciled, but all the attempts at . . . reconciliation were really nothing more than a declaration that a part of the divine constitution was never communicated to man and that we are ignorant of the laws by which God operates in the universe. This was the general attitude of all the theologians, even of those who went to the farthest extremes in their rational explanation of religion. It was left for Spinoza to do away with the unwritten and unknown part of the constitutional privileges of God's rule. God to him is law without any loophole and without any escape to ignorance.

And here is a selection from Wolfson's *Philo*:

The root of the problem, as [Philo] himself states it, was to be found in the peculiar laws practiced by the Jews. Many before Philo, and Philo himself, had tried to convince the world of the intrinsic merits of these laws. But he knew that the world was offended by these laws not because they were harmful, but because they were different; more so if it were constantly told that these laws were superior; and still more so if it actually felt that these laws were superior. These laws, says Philo, "are necessarily grave and severe, because they inculcate the highest standard of virtue; but gravity is austere, and austerity is held in aversion by the great mass of men because they favor pleasure." Indeed, one might argue, as Josephus later did argue, that similar religious differences exist also among non-Jews themselves. But Philo felt that the differences between the Jews and non-Jews are unlike the differences that may exist between various religious groups of non-Jews. The former are more fundamental. They place the Jews as a group apart from the totality of non-Jews, with all the varieties of religions and sects among the non-Jews themselves.

In these passages, language, idea, and the

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process of thought are brought together in a way that leads to understanding and to delight in understanding.

In his review, Professor Scholem has admirably summarized Schwarz's account of the main points of Wolfson's times and endowments. Wolfson was born in 1887 in the Lithuanian town of Ostrin. (According to Scholem, Wolfson adopted the spelling Austryn because that fit in better with Harvard elegance—which is possible.) There he received a typical talmudical education and was recognized as a Talmud prodigy. He arrived in the United States in 1903 and for two years continued yeshiva studies in Manhattan; it is said (Schwarz thinks the story may be apocryphal) that he had to leave the yeshiva because he proved ingeniously and wittily to his cronies that one should eat on Yom Kippur and fast the day before. Then he served as Hebrew school teacher and attended high school in Scranton, Pennsylvania. With luck, encouragement by a Harvard graduate in town, and brains, Wolfson won a scholarship to Harvard and entered in 1908. Thereafter he never left Harvard except for two years as a Sheldon fellow, traveling all over Europe in search of MS material in all the great European libraries, and for his military stint in World War I, from September 1918 to January 1919. He didn't leave Harvard even after he retired.

Although I was neither his student nor a close associate of his, I believe Wolfson will never be understood unless one recognizes immediately and plainspokenly that he fell in love with Harvard. He fell in love with it in 1908, and that love affair endured till the day he died, September 19, 1974. He left to Harvard his books and the bulk of his modest estate. Nor is this strange; neither is it trivial. Through the thirties and forties of this century—perhaps later, too—Jewish men who attended Harvard felt almost like a privileged caste. That there was snobbishness in this is true. But it was also true that at Harvard they came into a universe that was intellectually exciting in a multitude of subjects and forms. Socially it was marked by a way of expression and behavior, a manner, a poise, by which they had already begun to be charmed in the books they had read before arriving at Harvard Yard. And they felt it, too, in the subtle pressures American fashion was exerting on all prospering newcomers and on their children. "Fashion was not fashionable in London," wrote Henry Adams with his customary vinegar as he recalled a much earlier period, "until the Americans and the Jews were let loose."

That Jewish students at Harvard might be snubbed by Gold Coast stuffed shirts was sometimes infuriating to them, more often only annoying. The quota system itself was both delightful and humiliating: delightful because if you got in you were already regarded (by parents and uncles and girlfriends) as of the elite; humiliating because it was a policy calculated to define you as a second-class citizen. But taken all in all, you were a Harvard man (I think one still speaks of a Harvard man and a Yale alum).

All this was true of Wolfson at age twenty-one and age eighty-seven, but with a particular twist. He remembered the town of Ostrin vividly; in high school in Scranton he wrote of what he remembered. Many years later, talking with former students who had become his friends, he must have reminisced about Jewish life in Lithuania. And though he could talk of its quaintness, its devout spirit, he was always aware of the contrasting "spaciousness," the freedom, the liberty, the let-live in a land where there was still a regrettable prejudice against Jews but no pogroms (despite despicable Ku Kluxers). Harvard was a place where there was a library with more books than you could imagine in dreams, though not yet enough Hebrew books, and where to listen to Mr. Santayana's polished prose, as he lectured without notes, was to be overcome by the beauty of the English language. Inevitably that very bright Jewish young man contrasted his life in the small Lithuanian village with the orderliness and tranquillity of Harvard—its self-confidence, its atmosphere of learning, and the presence of resources for learning Greek, Latin, Arabic, English, modern European languages, and historical-philological disciplines. Unless we recover the intoxication he felt, we will fail to understand Wolfson's temptation and his simultaneous resolution never to pretend to be other than he was, never to fake. I think it was that peculiar combination of unrestricted intellectual freedom and beauty of surroundings that captured Wolfson's heart, and he capitulated to it in his research and

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writing on Crescas, on Spinoza, on Philo, on the Church Fathers, on the Kalam, and on the problems of medieval Jewish, Christian, and Arabic theologians and philosophers.

Whether Philo is indeed the keystone in philosophy between Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Spinoza is bound to be reflected upon again and again by every student who has read the two volumes Wolfson devoted to the Alexandrian Jew, and Wolfson's daring presentation may indeed prove too unsettling to one's traditional philosophical indoctrination. But the loss of balance, I think, will not be the result of "the other great book" by the scholar "at the neighbouring university of Yale" (an imaginative scholar indeed), "for whom," says Professor Scholem, "Philo was not a philosopher, let alone a great one, but the classic example of a Jewish mystic." This still rests on the assumption, far from established, that Hellenistic Judaism of the Egyptian variety represents a mystic Judaism. If Wolfson's painstaking demonstration in two volumes has not yet expelled that ghost, no one sentence or paragraph will do it. Wolfson may be demanding too much of us; like every thinker, Philo surely had his ecstatic moments and "like persons possessed and corybants [wished to] be filled with inspired frenzy." But if Philo is "the classic example of a Jewish mystic," then it is like saying that every Jew with mystical impulses is a Jewish mystic. What counts is his identity or—to use a word commonly and irritatingly favored nowadays—his ethnicity, not the substance of his experience. (In the first chapter of his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Scholem is much more cogent and therefore persuasive.)

More serious is Scholem's reproof, in his *T.L.S.* review, for failure to refer to Leo Strauss, "the author of the most extraordinary studies of *Spinoza's Critique of Religion.*" Strauss's was indeed a first-rate mind with a *pilpul*, "hypothetic-deductive method of text interpretation" of his own. Without trying to excuse the omission—for if it was deliberate it was unjust or intellectually in very bad taste—the dates that Scholem himself furnishes may supply the explanation. As for Wolfson, his maturing thoughts regarding Spinoza were taking shape (Schwarz reports) by 1919, and he was publishing studies in 1921, 1922, 1926. In October 1922 Santayana complimented him for his "first chapter on Spinoza": "I hope you will persevere and make a great success of the work." The two volumes of *The Philosophy of Spinoza* appeared in 1934, and the German edition of Strauss's work appeared in 1930. Nor should this be ignored: Although Wolfson in his essays never hesitated to reply to his critics, even quite sharply (Schwarz quotes a telling retort to George Sarton for criticism of *Crescas* and a devastating refutation of Paul Weiss for criticism of *Spinoza*), in his books and in the midst of argument on behalf of his interpretations or thesis he was not in the habit of detouring for polemical purposes. He kept strictly to his own course. As for Schwarz, against whom Scholem directs his charge ("he deprives the book of some truly dramatic confrontations which would have added more flavour to his portrait"), consider that the English translation of Strauss's volume was published in 1965 and that Schwarz died on 1 December 1967, having already been hospitalized because of his lingering illness before then. Moreover, I'm not at all sure that Schwarz read German, philosophical German especially, with ease.

At least in one place Scholem, I think, has misunderstood Schwarz. Despite his use of the word "excessive," when Schwarz speaks of Wolfson's "striving for perfection" ("A single term in philosophical or theological literature was for him a miniature compendium of thought . . ." and so on), it is not in criticism but in praise of Wolfson. Note how that paragraph, on page 211, continues and then closes: "The inexhaustible patience and supreme skill that Wolfson brought to bear on his subject resulted in an achievement that approximates the unattainable goal."

Willy-nilly this is beginning to sound like too much protest and would perhaps be more becoming on the part of Wolfson's students or of a Harvard man who knew him well. Or maybe not. Still, not only Schwarz's biography of Wolfson but Scholem's considered criticism must be treated seriously. Thus, through the reviewer and his review we learn that while Wolfson was, in Scholem's words, "one of the towering Jewish scholars of his period" ("A man of great erudition and wit, with a gift for penetrating analysis and the courage for breathtaking hypotheses"), he "hankered after Gentile praise." "The eulogy

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of a Jesuit Father," Scholem continues, "I was flabbergasted to witness, meant more to him than the admiration of his most distinguished Jewish colleagues." (Even more than the admiration of Louis Ginzberg, whom he held in awe? Not impossible.) All that name-dropping in the biography may be regarded as a kind of corroboration (as well as that "mothlike ambivalence toward publicity," quoted also by Scholem, which is not the same as delight in praise by Gentiles but is frequently close enough to be indistinguishable from it).

We touch here on a raw wound which once and for all ought to be exposed to the open air and not covered up with Band-Aids. It is an affliction whenever or on whomever it occurs, and I don't know one Jewish scholar affected by Western thought and expression—or any modern Jewish intellectual or creative artist whose activity involves Jewish materials—who has survived unscathed. Naturally, not all are wounded to the same degree. As with the appetite for gambling, some are satisfied by a little and some never know when to stop. But the wound is there, little or big, and reveals itself at times in hardly noticeable responses—a sparkle in the eye, smiles, tiny inflections, photos, just a touch more than the required cordialities, a secretly purring satisfaction, or the footnoted complimentary adjective done to a crisp, let alone recognizable cravenness and gross display thereof. No Western Jewish scholar I know is innocent, and the guilt includes the present reviewer. (I'll say this, however, for the *T.L.S.* reviewer, and I heard it from someone who should know: When Scholem was offered an honorary degree by one of the leading German universities, he turned it down—not out of surliness or grudge, but because he felt that "it was too soon, too soon.") If the great scholars—who ultimately are not in need of any approval other than their consciousness of, and pride in, their own achievements—if they can't always escape becoming casualties, you can imagine how vulnerable are those on whom uneasy lies the crown of their ambition. No one's sore has been healed, and this is often true even of those in yeshivas.

It is tempting to account for this embarrassing, invalid behavior by relating it to *galut*, to the compulsions accompanying life in countries not one's own. Live among the Gentiles and you try hard to please them; you're a guest and you seek eagerly to show gratitude to your hosts, or so the argument goes. You fear to offend them. A smile from them and you beam; a frown and you shrivel.

But even one month's observation of the conduct of Israeli scholars is sufficient to reveal that this convenient explanation has no necessary relation to reality. The same behavior flourishes "there" as "here" among "them" as among "us."

The truth is, this behavior is neither Jewish nor non-Jewish. It has to do with the mentality haunted by either number or size. Members of a disadvantaged and self-conscious minority—Cypriots, Armenians, Ukrainians, Balkans, Puerto Ricans, and so on and on—crave to put down roots in their new world, and the test of acceptance is always the approval of the others, the majority, the ones whose ancestors put down roots for *their* naturalization and admission to society at large. Nor is it different with small non-Western countries: they want to be treated as the equals of the big ones, and they will put on spectacular exhibitions of their grandiose accomplishments to validate their claims. Religious denominations are no different.

In this context Wolfson is simply typical and typically sad, even heartbreaking. A poor East European, an exceptionally bright Jewish youth, a *yeshiva bochur*, falls in love with America, above all with the English language. (In what other language does lyric poetry rise so effortlessly to pure song? Maybe Heine's German.) He is determined to master that language, so he becomes one of the finest creators of expository philosophical prose on both sides of the Atlantic: never misty, always lucid; never fumbling with immigrant dialect; never retreating behind metaphysical jargon because the substance is technical or ponderous; always thoroughgoing in review of the primary sources. The labors to achieve this felicity, in addition to mastering classical languages and Semitic ones, were labors he must have loved, to be sure, but they forced him into loneliness and hard work in all hours and all seasons—learning, remembering, testing, forming hypotheses, deducing, revising, writing, writing and rewriting. Like some anchorites in late antiquity, Wolfson enjoyed visitors. He suspected, quite sensibly, what he was accomplishing, and he wanted more than

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parochial recognition for it. He wanted recognition from the larger world as well as from his own people, who were happier to be proud of him the more he won the admiration of the wide world of international scholarship. Wolfson certainly wanted this, but always at the highest cost of performance, not at reduced rates! And the yeshiva from which he may have been dismissed later awarded him an honorary degree.

This whole attempted summary is shot through with sadness, for one always hopes that the great scholars and the great philosophers and the great artists and the great writers will never let us down in any respect. But that they never promised. ("I have known three great poets," Joseph Brodsky quotes W. H. Auden, "Each/one a prize son of a bitch.") So we are disappointed. But one promise (to himself, obviously) Wolfson never broke, and that was that he would master in the original the whole corpus of Western philosophy, and the relevant non-Western, from the early Greeks to Spinoza and beyond.

It seems to me, therefore, utterly gratuitous to say, as Scholem does: "There was always about him something of the air of an unfinished individual, a personality who had paid for his ambitions by sacrificing the fullness of life for something that, in his last years, he came to disparage and to decry." Neither of the two parts of this statement am I able to take seriously. To begin with the latter: Wolfson told his dear friends—as he was, so to speak, climbing into his deathbed—that he had made three mistakes in his life. "I should have married early. I should have written my works in Hebrew, or at least published one article a year in Hebrew. And I've spent too much time on the Kalam. It's my Vietnam." The remark is filled with wistfulness, with feelings of physical decline, and with the characteristic sentiments of human regret at not having been able to do even more than one had done. I do not believe that Wolfson did not mean what he said. He meant it at that moment. But nothing in the biography suggests that, had he been offered the opportunity to relive his life, it could have developed along other lines and still be his. While Wolfson was still a student, Harold E. Stearns had already recognized that the quiet scholar living next to him was "devastatingly well-informed on almost any subject . . . brought up, except the subject of girls, or, indeed, of sex in general, about which he appeared to be as innocent as a babe unborn." Evidently Stearns, too, had his naive moments. Wolfson may have been attracted by the young lady of the Paterson "kosher-eating snobs," as he described her family. But the singlemindedness of his lifelong working habits, of which he was unquestionably aware, must have instinctively impressed upon him that he could succeed neither as husband nor as family man. Being avuncular with one's students and later the children of former students is an altogether different piety from the day-to-day raising of one's own children, even if the former grows out of conscious or subconscious compensation for the latter.

So, too, his not writing in Hebrew; he probably could have done so without undue difficulty or any at all. However, this very facility was perhaps the underlying block. He had fallen in love with the English language, and writing superbly in it was to him a welcome challenge. And he relished intellectual challenge. To express his ideas, to translate into intelligible English the complexities of his various sources, obviously represented conquest to him. And maybe he never lost his Yiddish accent in speech because he concentrated all his rhetorical energy on writing.

Of course I do not overlook what must have been an accompanying and real motive: the desire to be read by the larger community of students of philosophy here and abroad. But that desire was only one more motor-charge to triumph over the language that was not his native tongue, but was the language of the campus and the country that had captured his imagination.

Challenge, it seems to me, is what for so many years held him captive to the Kalam studies (the volume appeared posthumously, and even on his sickbed he was still correcting proofs of text and index). He would never have liberated himself from its problems, its solutions, its terminology, its relevance or irrelevance. A reader of the biography feels like reminding the regretful Wolfson of the talmudic sentence he knew well enough on his own: "We have learned it's all one, much or little, so long as the heart (mind) has Heaven as its aim."

At all events, this is how I read what Leo W. Schwarz's biography is trying to convey. I

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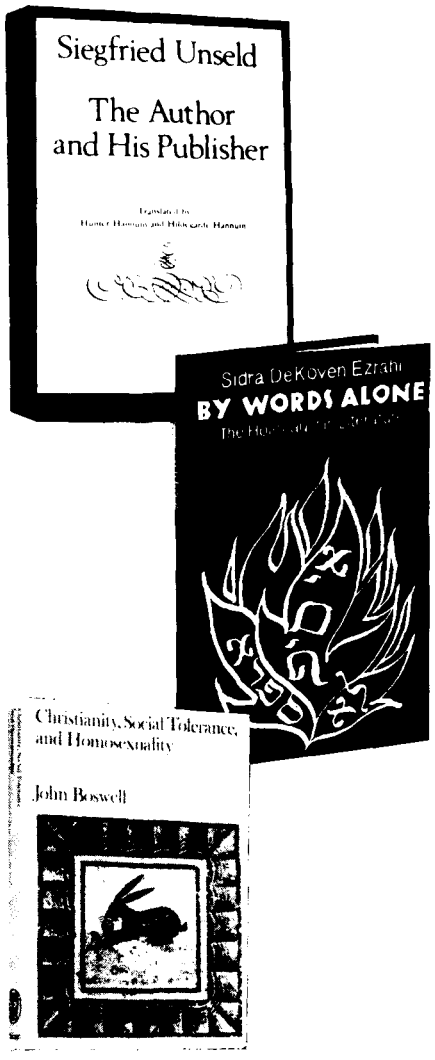

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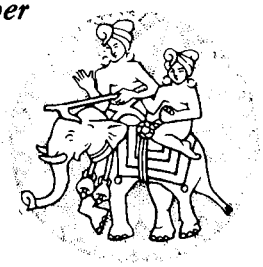

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see no indelible signs of disparagement or decrying in Wolfson's last years.

Nor is it particularly instructive to be informed "of the air of an unfinished individual," of paying "for his ambitions by sacrificing the fullness of life" (is there another form of payment?), every word of which is true. Who is a finished individual? The man who never marries but devotes his whole long life to creative study and teaching is doubtless unfinished. How about the man who marries a madwoman and in humiliation scurries to collect a hundred rabbinical signatures to be granted release to remarry, yet all the time produces important papers? Or the man who has no children? Or the scientist who can no longer satisfy even his mistress? Or the lady classicist who has never married because she has been too busy classifying artifacts from excavations? Everyone is unfinished, and very likely everyone is saved from insanity or meaningless existence by being fragmentary, being consumed by the work he gives himself over to—which is to our profit also.

Wolfson could say silly things. In my opinion, his essay "Escaping Judaism"—which is so frequently praised and which, needless to say, includes astute observations—is flawed by an undercurrent of self-satisfaction, and is altogether too chilly toward the troubles of young Jews in the twenties to serve as guide or comforter. His essay "How the Jews Will Reclaim Jesus," of which he seems to have been very fond, may still intrigue divinity schools sensitive to its innuendos, but is an exercise in futility. History may occasionally repeat itself, having nothing new under the sun to report for the moment; it may even be redeemed. But . . .

> I shall be telling this with a sigh
> Somewhere ages and ages hence:
> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
> I took the one less traveled by,
> And that has made all the difference.

Outside the poem, "sigh" is a little too strong, but let it stand, even if it doesn't always apply. There was a turn in the road, and so much happened in the course of the subsequent travels that it is foolish to speak of reclamations. Similarly that sermon on the verse, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God"—I wish I could be as sure as Wolfson was that his "professed atheist" is less given to double-talk than his "verbal theist."

I first heard the expression "unobservant orthodox," which Wolfson labeled his own Judaism, in 1952, not from Wolfson but from Richard Hofstadter, the American historian. I remember being amused and thinking, How much better that sounds than if I were to say "an unobservant Conservative Jew." Who coined that "unobservant orthodox" epithet, I do not know. Wolfson may have originated it, in an attempt to be witty. But in all seriousness it is not a bad self-characterization. The biography does hint that all his life he was being pulled by two forces: the emotional one of the piety of his upbringing and recollection, and the philosophic, post-Spinozistic one which told him that those early teachings could not be literally true (and *davka*, precisely because he was severely intellectually honest, he would not indulge in sleight-of-hand reconciliation; this was not uniquely Wolfsonian). He might admire that ancient master of allegory, but did not care to imitate him. And Wolfson was not of the sect that protects itself by metaphor or ambiguities or neologisms. So he put up with a rebelling stomach as he ate unkosher food and visited the traditional synagogue only very rarely, when the mood was on him or nostalgia overpowered him. He knew that the Law must be binding and that it was no longer so for him.

It may well be that irony and a spirit of puckishness helped him to survive a conflict which can be savage (banter as flight from anguish is not uncommon) when memory leads to longing and intellect leads to a different persuasion. "You see," Scholem reports that Wolfson said to him during a visit, "nobody will ever know whether I believe anything or not." And Scholem concludes, "Among the many characteristic and passionate sentences I have heard from Wolfson, this was certainly the most remarkable one." In an excessively charitable view, Wolfson's statement can almost be interpreted as a piece of antique-modern kabbalah: "Out of Nothingness my help cometh." But applied to Wolfson that would be phony. The truth is that not only "nobody" but also Wolfson himself never could decide whether he believed "anything" or not. He certainly believed in intellectual

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honesty and personal integrity. He didn't bother to say it; he lived his life that way, and this may be why his former students continued to love him. He knew that philosophy could not save his soul and that the foundations of orthodox Judaism had not withstood the assaults by his mind. The tableau and comment with which Scholem ends his review are virtually a confrontation between the Litvak and the Yekke: both failed to understand one another, since the one was being witty and the other did not have a sense of humor.

To sum up: this review is not intended as a defense of Wolfson, which would be impertinent. The Schwarz biography is indeed a biography written about a scholar, and scholars don't provide what we generally identify with thrills. But the Schwarz book is a clean and intelligent account. It is a record of the deep admiration of a student for a great scholar and a tribute, therefore, to both of them—to the student who was drawn to such a master and to the master (of whom nothing flamboyant is reported, unless you want to describe his cerebral performances by that term) who could inspire such devotion in one of his students; and the story is of a scholar who was truly extraordinary, even in greatness. As Milton Anastos put it when he began his address on Wolfson's eighty-fifth birthday celebration in the Rare Book Room of the Widener Library, he was "Magister Noster." There aren't that many around in the halls of ivy or on adjacent greenswards. And in its own way Scholem's review also attests to this.

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THE WHITE HOUSE YEARS. *By Henry Kissinger. Little, Brown. $20.*

Reviewed by MARTIN MAYER

When the accusation arose that researchers had written Jack Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage*, a man at Harper who had worked on the book commented mildly that there was no real reason to doubt the then senator's authorship. "It isn't," he said, "a very good book." The same defense could not be used for Henry Kissinger's *White House Years*, which is a very good book indeed, much better than anything he has previously written. These many pages are sustained by a narrative drive quite missing in the good doctor's (or, if you insist, the bad doctor's) studies of Metternich and Castlereagh, uses of nuclear weaponry, the Atlantic alliance. A big staff was involved in the preparation, but friends, enemies, and editors all insist that the book is this one man's creation and I believe them. He himself has said it, and it is greatly—but not, as we shall see, entirely—to his credit.

The narrative pulse is made stronger, of course, by the fact that Kissinger is telling a story, his own story too—statecraft with a human face, beauty marks and all. But beyond that, there is the growth of his ability to communicate during his eight years before the public. He is used to the sound of his own voice; if anyone in our time can afford now to relax, to unbutton a button, it's Henry Kissinger. He has established his persona. Finally, the book is not aimed, like its predecessors, at the community of scholars or at, as they are now called, "decision makers," but rather at the literate fraction of his established television audience.

By and large, the book has been reviewed on that level, with much rooting about for controversy. Providentially, William Shawcross's *Sideshow* appeared just before Kissinger's book and an enterprising reporter was able to dig up evidence that Kissinger made some minor changes in his own proof, almost certainly in response to *Sideshow*. It was in Shawcross's interest, both professionally and politically, to set up his book as a counterweight, and quite a lot of the press went along.

Interestingly, there is very little disagreement between Shawcross and Kissinger. Shawcross claims Kissinger and Nixon didn't care what happened to the Cambodians, and Kissinger contends only that the North Vietnamese cared even less. "It was they, not we, who decided to fight to the finish on the bleeding body of a small neutralist kingdom which wanted only to be left alone." (Note that it is the kingdom that bleeds, not people.) Kissinger is probably right in his claim

MARTIN MAYER, whose most recent book is *The Fate of the Dollar*, is now at work on a book about diplomacy, to be published next year.

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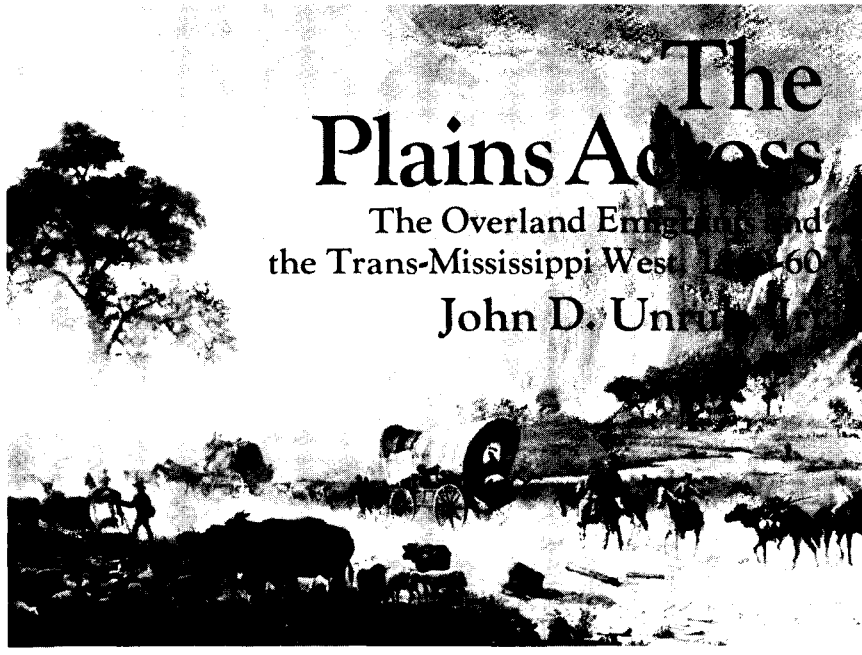

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that the United States meant its offer of complete neutralization of Cambodia, while the Vietnamese insisted on their right to use another country's soil in prosecuting their war.

Conversely, Kissinger argues that the 1970 attack on Cambodia was required in order to prevent the establishment of a "single large base area" for the North Vietnamese on the Cambodian side of the border, and to stop the flow of matériel to the Vietcong through the port of Sihanoukville. Shawcross never denies the large-scale use of Cambodian sanctuaries by forces who were, after all, killing Americans as well as South Vietnamese, and finds the attack reprehensible mostly because it was counterproductive, driving the trained Communist forces deeper into Cambodia, where they would do even more mischief. Shawcross would like to find evidence of American involvement in the plot that overthrew Sihanouk, but can't. Kissinger would like to claim that toward the end he solicited the help of Sihanouk in forming a government of national union that might be effective against the Khmer Rouge, but is compelled to admit that at best he was too grudging and too late. Essentially the argument between the two is whether the Vietnam war itself should have been pursued—and Shawcross has done well with the critics because very few people will say they thought that war was worth anything like what it cost.

There is remarkably little in *White House Years* of what Kissinger, speaking of the habits of Russian diplomats, calls "petty chiseling." (McGeorge Bundy, who gets even with Kissinger precisely in tempo with some comments on himself, has pointed out one interesting but not very important fudge—his saying different things to Thieu and to the American public at the time of the ceasefire.) The treatment of Nixon especially seems to me consistent with what Kissinger was saying privately at the time, and with the facts to the extent that we know them: that the President was extremely intelligent, capable of formulating large (but rarely sophisticated) views, personally insecure to an astonishing degree, and fundamentally indecisive until pushed to the wall, when his decisions went completely out of scale with the situations that had provoked them.

The vast bulk of the judgments that Kissinger passes on friend and foe are relatively charitable, and the only person he really seeks to leave for dead is William Rogers, whom he reduces from the status of Secretary of State to the position of Nixon's old friend. (He omits, however, a fact he liked to stress at the time to explain why he didn't and couldn't hope to cut Rogers out: "Remember, Rogers was at Tricia's wedding." He also fails to mention the fact, undoubtedly important to Nixon, that Rogers had been Kay Graham's lawyer and, in every sense, counselor—giving reason to hope that the antagonism of the *Washington Post* could be muted.) From the collection of thumbnail sketches—some brilliant, some just showy—one does miss any portrait of Bob Haldeman, whose never-ending suspicion of him was forever a spider in the Adviser's soup.

What is wrong with the book cuts a great deal deeper, however, than such questions as whether Kissinger told the whole truth about Cambodia or went in the tank for John Connally because, at the time he was writing, Connally seemed a reasonable guess for the next President. What is missing here is precisely what one would have hoped Henry Kissinger could have brought to an account of his experiences in office: a sense of historical origins, of his place in the mosaic of events in which he was privileged to participate. The travelogue treatment of China has already been noted by others. The Vietnam discussion begins essentially with Kennedy's decision to send American forces—a starting point chosen, obviously, with malice aforethought. Neither the years of French colonization nor the horrors of the pre-French era on that killing-ground are even mentioned; nor, perhaps even more important, is the background of Japanese occupation and of collaboration between Japan and Vichy France. Shawcross is sketchy on this material, but at least he recognizes its existence and importance. Kissinger the historian quite aggressively takes the world as he has found it.

Worse yet, the discussion of the division of Europe, and especially of Germany, is conducted in the vacuum of daily press reporting. Here, after all, is a subject which Kissinger, by both training and background, must see in deeper focus than concerns about German "nationalism" or East Bloc v. West Bloc. One of the Nixon administration's triumphs

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was the wooing of Rumania—as one of the Carter administration's triumphs was the wooing of Hungary, though it is by no means clear whether Washington understands the depths of hostility that persist between Hungary and Rumania. Surely a trained European historian should not treat as identical entities the restive satellites, each with its own history, its backgrounds of Turkish occupation, Austrian suzerainty, Russian and German conflict, and ethnic divisiveness that gave us the word "balkanization."

Kissinger's time in Washington was during the period when the great European historical trend of this century—the domination of the heartland by Germany—recovered from its devastation by Hitler. West Germany emerged as the strongest nation on one side of the Elbe, East Germany as the strongest economy (if not nation) on the other side. Budapest, Bucharest, even Prague now look to East Berlin with the same mixture of admiration, distrust, and fear that is felt in Paris, Brussels, and London when eyes turn to Bonn. Among the Germans themselves is a buried consciousness that the permanent link between the United States and the Soviet Union, the complicating consonance in their clashing tonalities, is a shared need for Germany to remain divided.

Against the background of a restored sense of *Volk*, of renewed romanticism, of the competing roles of Bavaria, Rhineland, the Hanse, Prussia, and of a renewed presence in East Africa, Brazil, even Melanesia, Willy Brandt came to office with *Ostpolitik*. Kissinger tells us he didn't like it off the top and never felt comfortable with Brandt personally (an oddity, given Brandt's uniquely clean record among contemporary German politicians vis-à-vis the Nazis). There must have been some process by which Kissinger came to terms with the beginnings of reconciliation between the two Germanys, put up with the naive anti-Americanism of Brandt's sidekick, Egon Bahr, and devoted his considerable skills to the service of the interminable negotiations that achieved the Berlin treaty. Of this internal process he tells us nothing—perhaps (and if so, it is the heart of what makes this book troubling) because he did not have the time to think through in any depth what he was doing and why. A strategic view of the world is doubtless better than a tactical view, but neither substitutes for a historical view.

Kissinger is aware of the problem. In his foreword he suggests that something has been lost by the arrival of "instantaneous communication": that the instructions formerly given to a negotiator, because they "had to be conceptual, . . . gave an insight into the thinking of statesmen," while today "they are usually tactical or technical and therefore are silent about larger purposes and premises." Moreover, he adds in his first chapter, "a period in high office consumes intellectual capital; it does not create it." Anyone who spends time around the State Department must note, with growing horror, the overloading burden of information under which not just the leaders but the troops must labor. Decisions on which questions really require an answer, which should be permitted to absorb the time, become monstrously difficult once it is assumed (as everyone does assume) that not a sparrow thuds to earth anywhere in the world but the United States must be involved. A last stimulus to pity and terror is the bureaucratic coordination system that requires many departments and bureaus and subbureaus to "sign off" virtually every work product, which must therefore be phrased in terms acceptable to—at the worst, recognizable by—all available perspectives on the situation.

The way out, all but inescapable, is to follow the lead of the newspapers. The President reads the newspapers, and so does the Secretary of State, who finds a digest of the press on the seat of his limousine when he leaves for the office; the summary of the cable traffic can wait until his arrival. The newspapers provide a phraseology and a remote wide angle that can be universal among the bureaus. Anyway, if the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are taking something seriously, then surely the myrmidons of State must take it seriously.

But the essence of the newspaper is that it is ahistorical. It bakes the world fresh today, and wraps fish tomorrow. After a while, the decision maker who starts his day with the newspaper begins to see the world as composed of these low-energy quanta. The use of "back channels" to get around the foreign policy bureaucracy is seen as advantageous, in large part because it avoids the need to present proposals and their logic in terms dictated from outside the transaction—although,

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William Frankena, Editor

The Philosophy and Future of

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Based on the work of the International Conference on the Philosophy of Graduate Education, 1978, this book explores the future of graduate education as it faces declining enrollments and a serious shortage of job opportunities for college teachers. Edited by William Frankena, the book brings together a wide range of ideas on ways in which the problem of training for the doctorate has been perceived and formulated, and so will be of special interest to scholars and administrators, especially those responsible for organizing and structuring graduate programs. Contributors include Gregory Vlastos, Maurice Mandelbaum, Nathan Glazer, Kenneth Boulding, and Sterling McMurrin.

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as Kissinger's long and wearisome recounting of North Vietnamese bargaining tactics demonstrates, until both sides know that they want the results they can get they tend to say the same things to each other that they say to the press.

The higher criticism of *The White House Years* is that the whole book is couched in terms which will be entirely recognizable to newspaper readers with moderate memories. One suspects that his years in office conditioned Kissinger actually to think in those terms. The ultimate defect of centralization in our time is its creation of the insistent trope toward seeing the world in a focus blurred by today's words. (The advantage of decentralization is that it permits mistakes to be made at levels where they can be relatively easily rectified, but that is matter for another piece.) Kissinger's decision to identify himself with political authority, rather than with the experts, leaves him in the end vulnerable to an accusation, not that he is mendacious or careerist (for he is neither, I think, any more than is the rest of Washington), but that he is intellectually a little vulgar.

Quite Batty

BATS OF AMERICA. *By Roger W. Barbour and Wayne H. Davis. University Press of Kentucky. $22.50.*

Reviewed by PAUL A. ZAHL

Bats belong to the zoological subclass Chiroptera. Greek for "hand wings," the word embraces all mammals that have matched birds and insects in utilizing the air's density for achieving flight. To be sure, there are "flying" lemurs and "flying" squirrels, but these are wingless—merely gliders.

Questions about the habits, peculiarities, and taxonomy of our chiropteran natives are likely to be answered in *Bats of America*, whose authors make good their promise to supply ". . . information enabling one to identify bats from the United States . . . information on their life history."

Many years ago, in the late Professor G. M. Allen's mammalogy class at Harvard, I learned that the chiropterans' fragile skeletons left only faint paleontological impressions, but enough to identify the group as of very ancient lineage, with a history dating back at least into the Eocene period of fifty to seventy million years ago. In those cradle times, factors of mutation and selective survival induced certain small tree-living mammals to glide, lemurlike, branch to branch. Evolution continued its play, ever pressured by the bat's varying environmental needs, until true flight was finally achieved along with correlative, often bizarre, variations in form and habit—variations whose common names tell more than paragraphs: leaf-chinned bat and hog-nosed, lump-nosed, mustached, small-footed, big-eared, and mastiff bats.

But for all the diversity shown by the forty known American species, bats worldwide are related by one striking feature: a dramatic lengthening of the arm bones and fingers to provide the framework for a flappable membranous web which endows its possessor with the Icarian gifts of lift and propulsion, just as feathered or veined wings empower birds and insects to master space. A massive thoracic musculature supplies motor energy. When at rest, the bat retracts its long fingers and web somewhat like an umbrella closing.

Caves, abandoned mines, belfries, trees, attics are the usual daytime habitats of bats. Why they choose the dark for feeding relates obviously to the abundance of night-flying insects, possibly also to freedom from most bird competition. Bats generally capture their prey by means of echo location—bat sonar. Here again bats are uniquely gifted. Their vocal cords produce high-frequency sound pulses which, when reflected by any object, moving or stationary, are received and assessed by an ultrasensitive aural mechanism and amplified, in some species, by huge sound-gathering ear shells. Sonar-derived information enables the bat, during flight and in total darkness, to determine its victim's speed, course, and position, then to sweep in for the killing bite. The bat's mouth is often formidably fanged. Ponderous insects are sometimes scooped into the maw by the

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wings. Bat sonar waves ordinarily pulsate at frequencies far above those audible by the human ear; hence bats, like yesterday's children, are seen but not heard.

Not all bats forage by means of sonar, nor indeed are they all insectivorous. Certain species, simply using their eyes, diversify their diet with tiny tree frogs, even surface-swimming minnows, small rodents, and lizards. The pallid bat captures no food whatever in flight, hunting only from the ground for crickets, grasshoppers, and beetles. And the long-tongued flower bat laps up nectar and pollen from deep within blossoms. Giant fruit bats, with wingspreads of three to five feet, are found only in the eastern tropics, and thus do not fall within the purview of Messrs. Barbour and Davis's volume.

Jungle law often consigns the aggressor to a taste of his own medicine. Bats are fair game for great horned and barn owls, raccoons and opossums, and climbing snakes. Even domestic cats can be a menace, sometimes lurking at dusk near attic vents or crouching in high grass for a leap at low flyers. The entire bat group is bothered, bitten, and burrowed into by mites, fleas, and ticks. At least one cave species consistently tests positive for rabies, although not many seem to die of the disease. Unless excessively molested, few bats are inclined to bite and need not be feared. The authors caution, however, that anyone visiting a bat cave should first have been immunized against rabies, for the virus may be airborne. A cavern in northern Mexico was once found strewn with dead bats by the hundreds of thousands; the cause of this mass mortality has never been established.

Bats tend to be loners by night, gregarious by day. They may localize in staggering numbers. Nine million roost in the Carlsbad Caverns; a cave recently discovered in Arizona shelters a daytime population of more than ten million; another in Texas, twice that. "A visit to one of the huge colonies is a memorable experience, . . ." write the authors; "disturbance of the intruder's lights causes them to peel off from the great clusters in rapidly increasing numbers until the cave is filled with hordes of milling bats . . . the air . . . rank with ammonia." In winter, when insects are scarce, these multitudes disperse into Mexico, islands of the Caribbean, and Central America, where the weather is mild and rations abundant. They return to their stateside camps sometime in February or March.

Most common of the cave dwellers are the rather small, long, and narrow-winged freetail bats which, setting out at dusk, "sound like the roar of a white-water river." The authors add: "when viewed from a distance, the dark columns . . . resemble a cloud of smoke." This species prefers dainty moths, and may travel as far as forty miles each day to find large concentrations of them. Certain moth species can actually pick up the bat's sonar pulses and, shifting into a zigzag flight pattern, may evade the hunter.

How bats navigate, round trip, from camp to feeding areas is still largely nature's secret. Bats experimentally released as far as 270 miles from their roosts eventually found their way back. Visual perception of terrestrial clues and landmarks as a means of guidance has been suggested; yet blinded bats, like homing pigeons, have been known to reappear at their site of origin.

Reproducing in the manner of most mammals, bats generally give birth to one babe at a time, although the big brown bat may have twins and the red bat may drop litters of up to four. The newborn, blind and naked, literally clings for dear life to one of its mother's nipples. At a later stage the young are sequestered in nursery groups within the roost, while the mother is out foraging. Whether she is able, for nursing, to identify her own from a churning mass of look-alikes is still an unsettled matter for the specialist.

With the coming of winter, species of the cold latitudes undergo a torporous hibernation. An abandoned mine in the Adirondacks houses a drowsily teeming winter population of little brown bats—a species, incidentally, capable of tolerating a wider range of temperature than any other mammal: from minus 6.5° to 55°C. Another northern species, preparing for winter, accumulates an enormous reserve of fat; one such plump individual was kept in a refrigerator for nearly a year with no ill effects. The yellow bat need not hibernate, for its entire life is spent in the relatively warm southland of the eastern United States, where it roosts and rears its young in festoons of Spanish moss.

Because Barbour and Davis have limited their coverage to American bats, which com-

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prise only three families of the eighteen distributed worldwide, the book will best serve those whose curiosity is localized. To this degree, and in clear unadorned language, the book provides an excellent handbook for both field and desk. Its numerous photographs, both color and monochrome, are impressive.

In literature and folklore bats have loomed dark and sinister. One has only to mention the chiropteran Count Dracula. But there is another side. Certainly they help keep in check the plague of summer insects; flower-visiting species are effective pollinators and seed dispersers; their guano is a valuable fertilizer.

Although in Western culture the bat has symbolized the mysteries of night, in parts of the Orient the bat signals happiness, good luck, and long life. The Oriental point of view is worth further consideration.

Where Loin Lies Down with Limb

THE FABER BOOK OF NONSENSE VERSE. *Edited by Geoffrey Grigson. Faber and Faber. $15.95.*

THE OXFORD BOOK OF AMERICAN LIGHT VERSE. *Chosen and edited by William Harmon. Oxford University Press. $15.95.*

Reviewed by RUTH BOORSTIN

Anthologist Geoffrey Grigson has searched the poetical byways from ballads to obituaries to come up with what he calls successful nonsense poems, refreshing both as "a counter-genre and an innocent game." He admits that the "liberated mirth" of the literary play instinct producing merry verse has sometimes been branded philistine. But he defends his choices simply because they poke fun and give pleasure, Joshing and wordplay, he says, fulfill a universal need; every national literature has developed a corpus of nonsense verse, produced by "a sense of fun and a sense of the absurd."

Only a rare and lucky parodist will find that his nonsense poem has survived its time and target to stand on its own legs (or should we say its own feet?). Even Walter de la Mare's brilliant parody of Wordsworth at his prosy worst loses its punch for those who have not read Wordsworth. Still the irrepressible Lewis Carroll's "White Knight's Ballad" remains delightful—whether or not we know the verbose old leech gatherer of Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence."

For silliness is ageless. As in Hilaire Belloc's "I shoot the Hippopotamus / With bullets made of platinum, / Because if I use leaden ones / His hide is sure to flatten 'em." Or Shirley Brooks's "New Proverb": "Early to bed and early to rise / Is the way to feel stupid and have red eyes." Or Oliver Goldsmith's elegy to Mrs. Mary Blaize, who "never followed wicked ways,— / *Unless when she was sinning,*" and "never slumbered in her pew,— / *But when she shut her eyes.*"

Grigson reminds us that nonsense verse is a genre all its own. It needs the foil of an accepted consensus of what verse is, a "shared idea of the way poetry works." Perhaps nowadays our art is so artless that it cannot be teased or spoofed. If word juggling brings no joy of recognition, stanzas are better off with a life of their own. Readers will enjoy these selections more if they have at least a passing familiarity with earlier verse forms. Some of them may bore or bewilder us, but plenty of others are good entertainment and a few are hilarious.

The editor's net has swept a broad and teeming sea. Our childhood comes back with: "If all the world were paper, / And all the sea were ink, / If all the trees were bread and cheese, / How should we do for drink?"

Then there is the catchy "I saw Esau sawing wood" and "Ten tinkers tinkling upon ten tinder-boxes with ten tenpenny tacks," to say nothing of Christian Morgenstern's "Great Lalulā":

> Kroklokwafzi? Semememi!
> Seiokrontro—praafriplo:
> Bifzi, bafzi; hulalemi:
> quasti basti bo . . .

We see some of our most solemn poets caught in their lighter moments—Arnold Bennett, Christopher Isherwood, A. E. Hous-

RUTH BOORSTIN, editor of books in the social sciences, publishes light verse in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, *American Libraries*, and elsewhere.

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man, G. K. Chesterton, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and of course T. S. Eliot, Rudyard Kipling, and William Blake. Samuel Johnson is here putting his hat upon his head, and Walter de la Mare in "The Waif" charmingly describes the "small hermaphrodite" called "Master Middlesex."

Conrad Aiken is the wittiest of the too numerous writers caught out on a limerick:

> It's time to make love: douse the glim,
> the fireflies twinkle and dim,
> the stars lean together
> like birds of a feather
> and the loin lies down with the limb.

It is worth the steep price of admission to be reminded of the delicious *Mots d'Heures: Gousses, Rames* (Mother Goose Rhymes), complete with elaborate faux footnotes. Like most of these verses, they are meant to be read aloud. Do you recognize our old friends phonetically converted into French? "Un petit d'un petit S'étonne aux Halles" or "Et qui rit des curés d'Oc? / De Meuse raines, houp! de cloques." So nonsense verse helps us hear our old familiars speaking in unfamiliar voices.

The silliness quotient is much lower in Professor William Harmon's *Oxford Book of American Light Verse.* Here we see the American cast of mind that likes to "deflate the hifalutin, debunk the hypocritical, abridge the sesquipedalian, praise the praiseworthy, and even make fun of the stated or implicit ideals of the Republic itself." In his anthology he includes a generous selection of "parodies, burlesques, travesties, satires, nonsense, *vers de société,* occasional poems, and verse that used to be called 'familiar.' " The operative word is "enjoyable."

Our memories of classroom and party singing are revived in "Oh! Susanna," "The Little Brown Jug," "Clementine," and Charles Carryl's "A Capital Ship for an Ocean Trip." Lyrics by Cole Porter, Stephen Sondheim, and Ira Gershwin make good reading. A generation grew up reciting "Casey at the Bat" and "Little Orphant Annie," and survived to raise us. We are reminded that when Gelett Burgess's "Purple Cow" was milked dry, he exclaimed: "I'm Sorry, now, I Wrote it! / But I can Tell you, Anyhow, / I'll Kill you if you Quote it!"

Reconstruction and Redemption in the South

Edited by Otto H. Olsen

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There is a sprinkling of parodies—and far too many dialect poems for my taste. Fred Emerson Brooks's "Foreigners at the Fair" is a painful example of this genre, which Hamlin Garland, Sam Walter Foss, James Russell Lowell, and the others here run into the ground. Still, Mr. Harmon had no choice but to sample the all-American accent.

Does "light verse" mean "lowbrow"? As for doggerel, its hoarse bark is more evident than its bite. To be intelligible, banal, or simply corny is not necessarily to be light. In one of his early forewords, written almost seventy years ago, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, the granddaddy of all Oxford anthologists, observed that "The Muses' house has many mansions." But, he noted, "the function of the anthologist includes criticizing in silence." Or criticizing by omission. Should we leave out Edgar Guest's "It takes a heap o' livin' in a house t'make it home" or Thomas Holley Chivers's "Lily Adair"? The charitable editor reminds us that bad verse as well as good has meant a lot to a lot of people. He justifies his sense of taste by including many verses that are apt and funny. When Stoddard read that "A plumber may be a poet, but a poet is not likely to be a plumber," he responded: "The poet pipes his lay / But the plumber lays his pipes." And John Tabb charmingly reports the tryst between the little tomato and the little potato: "Neither suspected a mutual love / Till they met in a Brunswick stew."

The last third of this anthology is full of bons mots, from Peter Viereck's "Today the women come and go / Talking of T. S. Eliot" to Kenneth Rexroth's brilliant "The okapi is extinct. The reason is under 'N.'" Richard Eberhart sings the beauties of Harvard, where you warble "your native footnotes mild." And no one can tell us more about publishers' parties than Phyllis McGinley.

If poets and anthologists end up in the same afterworld, Geoffrey Grigson will be able to look Thomas Hood, C. S. Lewis, Algernon Swinburne, or Vachel Lindsay right in the eye. He printed as nonsense verse what they had written tongue in cheek. But did John Greenleaf Whittier ever expect that his "Barbara Frietchie" or "The Barefoot Boy" would survive in a book of light verse? Will Longfellow snub Mr. Harmon up there for including "The Village Blacksmith" and "Paul Revere's Ride" in his collection? Will Edgar Allan Poe sulk at meeting the man who anthologized "The Bells" as if it were only another limerick? The category "light verse" is perilous and misleading. Stephen Crane's "Man Said to the Universe" walks lightly but carries a heavy message. Will he walk past Mr. Harmon in disapproving silence?

Reviewing B. E.

REVIEWING BEFORE THE *Edinburgh* 1788–1802. *By Derek Roper. University of Delaware Press. $18.*

Reviewed by JOHN CLIVE

This is an important book. It corrects, once and for all, one of the myths of English literary history that over the years has been perpetuated, in whole or in part, by textbook writers and by the authors of monographs on nineteenth-century reviewing—including, let me be quick to add, the present reviewer. The myth ran somewhat as follows: Eighteenth-century English reviewers were for the most part hack writers in thrall for low pay to booksellers who frequently owned the journals for which they wrote. Thus their reviews were often the merest puffery. When they were not, they were just as often only summaries of the works under consideration, containing extensive extracts from those works but little real criticism. Then, in 1802, Francis Jeffrey and some of his friends founded the *Edinburgh Review*, and everything changed. Reviewers were paid well; they wrote real critical articles; the booksellers lost their power; professional reviewing became respectable overnight. And with the period of the great quarterlies—the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, the *Westminster* among others—a new era of serious reviewing had begun.

Mr. Roper begins by pointing out that, during the period he deals with, the "old" re-

JOHN CLIVE, Kenan Professor of History and Literature at Harvard, is the author of a biography of Macaulay and of *Scotch Reviewers, "The Edinburgh Review," 1802–1815.*

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views drew on some very distinguished contributors. Thus between 1788 and 1802 James Mackintosh and Richard Brinsley Sheridan wrote for the *Monthly* on politics; the great Dr. Charles Burney on music; Thomas Holcroft and William Taylor of Norwich on modern literature. Coleridge, Southey, and Samuel Parr reviewed for the *Critical*; Henry Fuseli, Mary Wollstonecraft, and William Cowper for the *Analytical*. Other well-known scholars and men of letters contributed to the *English* and the *British Critic*. And their contributions were by no means mere summaries of the books under review, though such summaries did occasionally appear. Nor were these reviewers badly paid. So much for hacks!

Furthermore, the reviews were not mere booksellers' advertisements. In fact, it is hard to find the textbook stereotype of the bookseller-editor-advertiser. Though there were occasional abuses, they derived neither from commercial nor from political pressures but from that mixture of personal friendship and critical reviewing which was, is, and will always be the source of possible abuse. Mr. Roper admits that the late eighteenth-century critics most often erred on the side of leniency, especially when dealing with poetry. But favorable notices outnumber unfavorable ones only by about two to one, "which does not seem excessive when the literature dealt with includes all the best writing of the period." All the evidence suggests that in the last quarter of the eighteenth century the major English reviews were as ably staffed and as honestly edited as those of any later period. So much for the textbooks!

But the principal myth to which Mr. Roper ably administers the quietus is that of the so-called execrable quality of reviewing before the *Edinburgh*. There was only one way in which to do this, and hitherto it had daunted lesser men than Mr. Roper: to read through a large number of reviews written before 1802 and to make strict and consistent judgments as to their quality. This he has proceeded to do—reading, in what can only be called heroic fashion, through a dozen or so years of five major late eighteenth-century reviews: the *Monthly*, the *Critical*, the *English*, the *Analytical*, and the *British Critic*. The next step was to judge their treatment of important literature between 1788 and 1802 as "satisfactory" or otherwise by the following

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criterion: "A satisfactory review is one which takes the work under review with the right degree of seriousness, and points out real and important merits or faults."

One can certainly quarrel with that definition. I would suppose that many of us, when asked to name the most memorable handful of reviews we have read, say, for the purpose of compiling an anthology, might choose our candidates not so much because they attained a proper and fair balance of praise and blame but because, however wildly biased in one or the other direction, they managed to convey those incidental flashes of illumination which often stick in the mind when more measured and justly balanced criticism has long disappeared from it. I would add that this is not just a matter of the memorability of slashing reviews—say, Macaulay on the poetry of Robert Montgomery. Sometimes what impresses or moves us most is what Walter Scott called "that enthusiastic feeling which like sun-shine upon a landscape lights up every beauty and palliates if it cannot hide every defect." However reprehensible that may be, some of us open the *New York Review of Books* or the *Times Literary Supplement*—not to speak of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR—not in the hope of finding "satisfactory" reviews according to Mr. Roper's definition but, rather, in the hope of finding reviews that are affectionate or devastating or perhaps merely amusing and idiosyncratic.

But, having said this, and having noted that Mr. Roper freely admits to finding the calm and reasonable style of eighteenth-century reviews at their best more appropriate and agreeable than the more aggressive style of their successors, one can only admire the industry and the learning that led him to undertake his task. One gladly forgives him the well-earned tone of self-satisfaction that creeps into his pages from time to time and welcomes his conclusions as a significant contribution to the history of English "lit. crit."

What are those conclusions? The first is that the poets were, on the whole, well served by the reviewers. Robert Burns and Robert Bloomfield, the latter reviewed by Southey, received judicious praise; Samuel Rogers and Thomas Campbell were overpraised. Only Southey really appreciated the merits of Landor's *Gebir*. Ample justice was done to Thomas Moore (favorable) and to the Della-Cruscans (unfavorable). More important, the reception of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's early poems was friendly and helpful. It is particularly interesting to know that *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), far from being neglected or savaged by shocked "Augustan" reviewers, received a good deal of space and generally favorable notices. Curiously, the least favorable review of it was written by Southey who, as Mr. Roper remarks, "could not foresee that four years later he, Wordsworth, and Coleridge would be lumped together as 'the new school,' and beaten [by the *Edinburgh*] with the rod of a sham Augustanism." Southey's own poetry was first overpraised and later undervalued. But it may fairly be claimed, Mr. Roper concludes, that the late eighteenth-century reviews were more tolerant and open-minded about poetry than those of the *Edinburgh* and its successors were to be for many years.

As for fiction, Charlotte Smith was justly dealt with; ten of sixteen reviews of Ann Radcliffe's romances were, by Mr. Roper's definition, "satisfactory"; and Matthew Gregory Lewis's *Monk* received its critical due, particularly from Coleridge in the *Critical*, whose comment that "the sufferings he [Lewis] describes are so frightful and intolerable, that we break with abruptness from the delusion" could usefully be applied to some of today's sadomasochistic fiction. The so-called "novels of purpose"—by reformers like Robert Bage, Holcroft, Godwin, and Mary Hays—were on the whole not sympathetically received. None except Godwin's *Caleb Williams* are read today. But *Castle Rackrent* is. Maria Edgeworth's regional novel, in retrospect perhaps the most original work of fiction of its day and the novel that inspired Scott and Turgenev to try to do for Scotland and Russia what she had done for Ireland, received a couple of brief appreciative notices but no full-length reviews. It is unfortunate, Mr. Roper remarks, that less than justice was thus done to *Castle Rackrent* and *Caleb Williams*. Nonetheless, more than half of the eighty-eight reviews of fiction that appeared during the years under consideration were, in fact, "satisfactory."

Controversial works on politics and religion —Richard Price, Burke, Paine, Wollstonecraft, Godwin, William Paley, William Wilberforce, and Malthus—were less successfully

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reviewed than poetry and novels. As was only to be expected, caution and prejudice made themselves felt in this realm. Even so, a number of fair-minded and intelligent reviews appeared, and some genuine contributions were made to "the debate on the French Revolution."

One of Mr. Roper's most informative chapters is that dealing with the reception of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* (1776–88) and Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791). Here, after all, appearing within three years of one another, were the greatest work of history and the greatest biography in the English language. How did they fare? There is no doubt that the critics recognized the importance of both these works, though the ribaldry of Gibbon led a certain John Whitaker to ask, "How full must be the fountain of impurity in the heart, when the stream is foaming and frothing so much through the page?" But, Whitaker apart, the reviewers of 1788 paid due tribute to Gibbon's greatness. The originality and value of Boswell's *Johnson* were less generally appreciated but by no means ignored.

These, then, are Mr. Roper's findings. They add up numerically to the conclusion that out of the 255 articles he discusses, 121 may be called "satisfactory" pieces of reviewing. That constitutes a "success rate" of 48 percent, "far from ideal, but . . . very much better than conventional accounts of these Reviews would lead one to expect."

If the record was that good, and there is now no reason to doubt that it was, it remains to ask why the *Edinburgh* triumphed so dramatically in 1802. The main reason, Mr. Roper points out, can be summed up in a single word: selectivity. The principal eighteenth-century reviews attempted to be comprehensive, even encyclopedic, to record the advance of knowledge in every field of human enterprise. Reviewers often had to fill their "sheet" (sixteen printed pages) by dealing with sixteen or more works, most of them mediocre, for the sake of coverage and completeness. The intention was not to produce a journal of opinion and entertainment, but rather an objective chronicle of cultural progress. By the end of the century, the sheer number of new publications made this kind of comprehensive reviewing increasingly difficult, if not impossible. And the *Edinburgh*, quite explicitly confining itself to a few long review articles about selected books, quickly captured a reading public ready for such an innovation.

With selectivity came other innovations: books used as pegs on which to hang long general essays; a desire to amuse and entertain as well as to instruct, sometimes at the cost of objectivity; the attempt to imbue sensible people with sensible views on controversial subjects. Mr. Roper makes no bones about preferring the old style. I disagree. But that's another story, and does not in the least diminish his achievement in providing a final resting place for an all too long-lived myth.

Departmental Memo

HOWARD MUMFORD JONES: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. *University of Wisconsin Press. $17.50.*

Reviewed by ROGER J. PORTER

There is no reason why the autobiography of one who has lived mostly the life of the mind should be less exciting than that of a Ulysses S. Grant or Charlie Chaplin. R. G. Collingwood tells us much that is fascinating about the intellect itself; Vladimir Nabokov explores the meaning of memory, enthralled by the mind's own "combinational delight"; Gertrude Stein finds rich complexity and wit in the very activity of perception. We read their autobiographies with pleasure because the intricate nature of the human mind and its patterns of operation become the story they tell; experience and understanding are of a piece, and the narrations are suited to the complications of thought.

Sadly this is not the case with Howard Mumford Jones's *An Autobiography*. Professor Jones does have a story to relate: the development of a scholar from a somewhat provincial academic career at the universities of Montana, Texas, and Wisconsin to national renown at Harvard—paralleling his own early interest in regional literature to his eventual flowering as a historian of the relations between European and American cul-

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ture. But his book simply cannot match those others in power, intensity, or importance. He is an avuncular narrator, recalling the innumerable and fussy details of faculty meetings and gossip, the accumulated furniture in the houses of every university town he has inhabited, or the trivial habits of this and that colleague whose contribution to the life story is often tangential or irrelevant.

There is a place for the anecdotal autobiography, but it takes a Gertrude Stein to dignify it by turning its employment into a theory of mock self-effacement. Jones tells us too many tales we have no special desire to hear: how a porter helped him find his berth on the night train out of St. Louis, how a bellhop brought him a rubber stopper for his bath, how he managed to collate a novel of Tom Moore's with its manuscript when printed matter at the Huntington Library had to be consulted on one floor, manuscripts on another. Rousseau could charge such small moments with energy and significance, but not Jones. All life is felt on the same plane: "I breakfasted, I lunched, I watched the endless rolling plains of Central Texas disappear from my vision, I meditated on teaching; I thought about life, death, and eternity." Indeed it is not exhilarating to read that his central problem for many months was what course he should teach as his third offering at the University of Texas. He might have treated this issue ironically, or gone on to speak about his own needs and interests as a teacher. Unfortunately the problem remains at the level of a departmental memo.

"I have tried to teach myself stoicism and control," he notes proudly, and his prose itself is orderly and balanced, a testimony to the cautions of his beloved eighteenth century.

> Going through the [Panama] Canal was to me more interesting than the day in Havana; for, though I have not a vestige of engineering training, I could not but admire the straight, clean lines of everything; the quiet, ease, and orderliness with which we passed through locks and cuts and lakes; and the virtual invisibility of human beings except those on shipboard.

The desire to keep the landscape free from human untidiness corresponds to Jones's reservations about disclosing much that cannot be rationally explained, and pleasantries and amusing encounters dominate the narrative. Jones is a scholar who has always enjoyed finding a niche for his numerous 3 × 5's, and his books on American culture are monuments of orderly accumulated information uncluttered by too much risky speculation. (No contrast could be more revealing in this respect than that between certain sections of Jones's *O Strange New World* and Leslie Fiedler's *The Return of the Vanishing American.*)

Jones's autobiography is a genteel and decidedly old-fashioned book—almost comic in its attempt to show that he knows a bit of the language of our times (always quaintly placed in quotes) but wants very little to do with it. More distressing is his reluctance to probe the deepest levels of his own consciousness. Many times in his book he suggests an interest in reconciling romantic individualism with orderly and reasonable civic process, but I sense an evasion of his own psychological complexity, a fear of the personal or of anything suggesting a less than orderly march to professional achievement. In part this is because Jones equates frankness with sexual disclosure or candor of a slightly lurid hue. In place of a more revealing and intimate disclosure of his mind and feelings, we have pronouncements about the nature of the humanities or the relation between literature and history, all delivered with the excitement of a report from the committee on educational policy to a faculty overseeing the curriculum. It is not clear which readers will greet such statements with less enthusiasm: academics to whom they will be numbingly familiar or laymen for whom they will validate their worst images of the academy. Jones's problem is that while he endows the profession with too much lofty consequence ("I hold that intelligently managed higher education is quintessential to that more perfect union the Founding Fathers dreamed of"), at the same time he trivializes it (his lengthy and eulogistic description of the Harvard tercentenary celebration reeks of humorless, self-congratulatory pomp).

Too much of this book veers between rambling portraits of friends, college catalogue histories, and colloquia rhetoric. Its tone is often stiffly erudite ("La Crosse . . . though it was out of what Goethe would call the great world") or embarrassingly prissy ("I must first say something about Jim, the storybook Negro, the kind that, I fear, infuriates

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the 'affirmative action' people today"). What is vexing about the book is its air of satisfaction that allows no breathing room for doubt. The frontispiece photograph shows Professor Jones seated in a Jamesian pose, hands folded smugly over his chest, the whole demeanor exuding a magisterial complacency. The portrait is a message from a distant age; it suggests total victory over all human bedevilment. All the ingredients of Henry Adams's ironic and modern struggle for self-mastery are missing here: the driving urgency of the story, the wit and complexity of self-analysis, the sheer density of metaphor.

Another disappointment lies in Jones's silence on the question of teaching. He gives us a defense of "a well-organized lecture course," but from a man who has spent his whole life as a teacher we learn nothing about his relations with his students or his thoughts on the complex interactions between mentor and pupil (terms often interchangeable). He lists some teaching assistants who later became famous, but notes only that they counterbalanced "some of my section men [who] were rather lacking in talent." Throughout Jones's book there is almost nothing about the drama of mind in the classroom. It is a pity, for although Jones argues the traditional case for humanism, he tells us painfully little about the human, passionate side of teaching.

Yet there are moments when Jones writes engagingly—about the way he became a literary historian, concerned with the connections between texts and the shaping forces of culture and impatient with mere self-generating theories of art. The best passages in the book depict the young Jones traveling by train across vast stretches of the American landscape, coming into personal touch with the immensity of its space and recognizing the limits of a regional approach to our literature. As he moves to universities in the Far West, Midwest, Southwest, South, and East, he constantly rethinks the development of American cultural history to take in its origins in the old world—his own continuing adaptations to new sections of the country standing in his mind for the adaptation of European strangers to the new American environment. This is the only place in the book where we clearly sense the personal grounding of Jones's scholarship. He also portrays

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with skill American small-town life in the early years of the century, managing to resist any sentimental notion that it was a period of innocence to be contrasted with contemporary chaos.

These glimpses, as well as his narrative excursions into local politics, his stint in the U.S. Cavalry, and his teaching of German POWs during World War II, are supposed to justify his repudiation of "the humanist as an unpractical dreamer living in an ivory tower. I have touched life on too many sides to believe that the university world is remote from the 'real' world of business, politics, and women's clubs." I hope that last item is meant tongue-in-cheek, but I am not sure. Professor Jones asserts the largeness of his mission, but he has staked his claim within the very institutional confines he seeks to expand. Perhaps the trouble is that if the autobiography of an academic is to be truly interesting it must transcend the academy, however broadly defined. This means more than taking the reader to symposia, universities abroad, or the boardrooms of the American Council of Learned Societies. It has to do with dramatizing the power of the imagination itself, giving it the same energy that Adams claimed for the dynamo and that Louis Sullivan, in one of the great American autobiographies, claimed both for the skyscraper and the visionary power of the American mind.

Playing Without a Net

LESS THAN WORDS CAN SAY. *By Richard Mitchell. Little, Brown. $8.95.*
ENGLISH FOR EVERYBODY. *By Ellsworth Barnard. Dinosaur Press. Paper, $5.*

Reviewed by DOUGLAS BUSH

These two books deal, in very different ways, with problems of illiteracy, which of late have caused so much public concern.

Richard Mitchell, a professor of English, has won a reputation in and beyond his own institution (Glassboro State College) by his fearless recording of the linguistic sins of its own officers. "The Underground Grammarian" has now broadened his range and fires a fusillade at a multitude of sitting or strutting ducks who might be called, in Elizabethan phrase, "caterpillars of the commonwealth." As his title suggests, he attacks especially the epidemic disease of bureaucratic language, the flatulent medium of communication which does not communicate because it conceals meaning, or the absence of meaning, under a smoke screen of pseudoscientific and supposedly impressive verbiage. This mosaic of psychological, sociological, educationist, and business terminology is a kind of inflation far above the national economic average. Its effect on the intelligent and educated layman is intellectual anesthesia and emotional exasperation.

That is one kind of illiteracy. The other, and more rudimentary, kind comprises the misuse of words, ungrammatical locutions, bad spelling, and the like. The two diseases may flourish separately or in combination. Both are results of cultural poverty and lack of knowledge, intelligence, and taste. Sinners of both kinds, notably administrators and politicians and hordes of people of all types and ages, are manifestly not accustomed to reading good English, or, if they are, it has not rubbed off on them. Mitchell is concerned mainly with jargon, fuzzy thinking, and pretentious obfuscation, but he takes some account of run-of-the-mill blunders in plain English.

I might say that in 1972 THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR published a piece of mine on this last topic, in which I gave some examples of the misuse of words by reputable writers who should have known better. I have a long and growing list of such sins culled from current books and periodicals. My latest item cannot be politely categorized. According to a staff writer in the *New Republic* (December 29, 1979, page 7), a certain political argument is "still revelent"—which could hardly have been a mere misprint. I may add that one simple old word, *before,* has been virtually eliminated from American English and replaced by a bit of jargon. If modern mothers

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read to their children Clement Moore's verses about the coming of Santa Claus, we may wonder whether they instinctively begin, " 'Twas the night prior to Christmas."

Mitchell writes with colloquial vigor, and his wit and humor are often entertaining, though sometimes grievously labored. But occasional excesses of satirical jocularity should not lead his readers to miss the fervent earnestness of his campaign for good English. He sees the matter as far more than a tempest in a grammarian's teapot. It is nothing less than a battle between informed reason and uninformed unreason for possession of the mind and soul of Everyman, because—to use a horrid new verb which has become a vogue word—it "impacts" our lives at every point. He insists repeatedly on what can never be proclaimed often enough: that the inability to write comes from the inability to think. He puts the blame chiefly on schoolteachers and their teachers, who do not read and cannot write. During the past half century, I recall, statistical tables on scholastic literacy have shown students majoring in education regularly at the bottom. During my forty years of teaching, I had a number of these students in my classes and got the impression that most of them had read next to nothing except textbooks written by professors of education.

I can mention only two more of Mitchell's many targets. He assails attempts to teach "values" and "attitudes"—not along with, but instead of, subjects and substance. Pedagogical theory and practice have long encouraged vague rhetoric rather than precise knowledge and thought, and educationists as a body have disparaged mere memory; after all, thought is hampered by real knowledge. "Like love, . . . perfect inanity casteth out fear." Mitchell does not, however, endorse the recent demands for "minimum competence testing" of fundamental knowledge because, he says, the testers will be the experts, the educationists who throughout this century have been active agents of linguistic corruption.

Mitchell's arraignment of American education may be subject to occasional discount for exaggeration, for undiscriminating concentration on the worst; but, to echo Dr. Johnson's tribute to a woman, he has "a bottom of good

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sense," or, in Johnson's decorous emendation, he is "fundamentally sensible." His book may be read chiefly by those who, though sometimes put off by his bouncy manner, will welcome a man who is so passionately on the side of the angels. The considerable army of "the enemy" who need to have their withers wrung will no doubt, like Mr. Podsnap, wave the book out of existence.

Professor Ellsworth Barnard, whose range of interest is suggested by his books on Shelley and Edwin Arlington Robinson and his big biography of Wendell Willkie, has written an urgent plea for a flexibly liberal and pragmatic attitude toward language and style. His book is not merely another manual for students; in many respects it rises above that genre. As the title shows, it is addressed to everybody, and it contains an abundance of practical wisdom. The first part is about "Usage and Grammar," the second about "Style" (clarity, naturalness, forcefulness, and beauty), and there is an "Epilogue. On Teaching and Learning the Use of English Prose." This last section and some preceding pages embody a deeply felt appreciation of great writing which should kindle readers. The whole book is highly readable. It is also highly provocative. My onetime student and longtime friend has always been a rebel who loves a skirmish, and he would not object to my focusing on the parts of his book which, while devoid of Mitchell's pyrotechnics, are decidedly controversial. There is no space here for more than one or two of his many concrete examples of usage which he accepts and I abhor.

Barnard's major premise, as stated in the preface, is "that in the use of language there are no absolutes, but that rightness is relative to the user, the subject, and the audience; and that all these exist in relation to a particular place, time, and culture, and are therefore subject to change." He claims no originality for this thesis, with which, so far as it goes, probably few would disagree. Difficulties would begin with specific applications: in normal writing would it be absolutism to require a plural verb with a plural subject? The last sentence of the introduction is more combative: the "modest aim" of the book, "which is intended to be an essay in understanding," is "an appeal to reason against unreason, to fact against prejudice, to experience against authority." But it is not self-evident that reason, fact, and experience are all on one side; and his absolutist villains may appear to have some virtues.

On the whole, Barnard takes the line followed by the notorious third edition of *Webster's Dictionary*; "In language, what is used is right—and *has* to be." But, he says, "This does not mean that 'anything goes' "; it depends on the situation and the social group. Barnard links Dr. Johnson with *Webster's* as recording only usage without prescription, but that linkage is hardly warranted. Johnson, as he told Bishop Percy, began with careful reading "of all such English writers as were most correct in their language," and his aim, says W. J. Bate, his recent masterly biographer, was "to provide a pragmatic standard for correctness and propriety." And does the dividing of people into social groups, however realistic, altogether avoid the "snobbishness" which Barnard associates with appeals to authority? The ideal goal of the so-called absolutism that he reprehends is to raise all people to or toward a standard, to preserve and purify the language of the tribe from barbarian encroachments, to which in our age even the educated can readily succumb. After all, playing tennis with a net is preferable to playing without one.

I have not observed that Barnard allows for the large plain fact of widespread ignorance. His making contemporary usage the supreme arbiter prompts the immediate question, "Whose usage?" Thus ignorance appears to become a joint arbiter. Barnard admits that in his own writing he does not practice the principle he preaches; his admirably "correct" writing is in fact that of an absolutist. His defense is that he writes in the way that is natural for him—the natural product, that is, of early training, sensitivity, and much reading. But there are millions of people in or beyond school and college whose knowledge of history and literature and science is hardly respectable or reliable. Why should these people be assumed to possess final authority in matters of language and style? And if "the function of language is communication," if all parties "have to agree on what words mean," and if "the first re-

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quirement of clarity is the choice of the exact word," these conditions are rather hard to reconcile with Barnard's line of argument. He himself deplores the confusing of such words as "disinterested" and "uninterested," "infer" and "imply," "flaunt" and "flout," and apparently the incredible confusing of "incredible" and "incredulous." But, sub specie aeternitatis, he refuses to grieve over such manifestations of the march of mind: "the first word loses its original meaning and appropriates the meaning of the second, which then passes out of use." Others may grieve for the loss of essential distinctions and impoverishment of the language.

However, I must commend this book to all people who have a real concern with language and relish a forceful argument which—at the opposite pole from Mitchell's in every way—likewise invites or compels readers to take sides on both principles and cases.

Natural Selection

THE GNOSTIC GOSPELS. *By Elaine Pagels. Random House. $10.*

Reviewed by BRIAN HAYES

Christianity is a literary religion, grounded not merely in the Word but in the Book. It has a canon of texts; the most important texts tell a story; the central (or crucial) elements of the faith can all be traced to themes and incidents of the story. Whatever happened in Jerusalem circa A.D. 30, Christianity did not begin there and then. It began some decades later, primarily in hellenized communities around the eastern basin of the Mediterranean, with the composition or compilation of the Pauline epistles and the gospels. The production of anachronistic accounts of the life and the teachings of Jesus remained a thriving industry for another hundred years. Whether this literature was read as history or pseudo history, it was the fundamental source of belief because it was the only source. The founders of the church had nothing else to go on, nor do we.

Interpretation and reinterpretation of the primary texts commenced immediately. As Frank Kermode has recently pointed out, every gospel can be read as a gloss on its predecessors. The early exegetes lacked the philological power tools of modern biblical scholarship, but they were hardly credulous or unsophisticated readers. There is nothing primitive in their ideas. Theirs was the great age of midrash, and even those who were not trained in the tradition of rabbinic Judaism must have been influenced by it. Theirs was also an age of parable, or riddle; dark saying seems to have been more common than plain speaking. The framers of Christian theology were well acquainted with the principle that meaning must be brought to a text or else teased out of it.

The various sects grouped under the label of Gnosticism were among the most intrepid of the early interpreters. Perhaps the one definitive characteristic shared by all the Gnostic groups was a belief that texts can have a deep or a hidden meaning, often a meaning deliberately concealed from outsiders. The Greek *gnosis* evidently meant more to them than simple knowledge; Elaine Pagels suggests translating it as "insight." Thus *gnosis* is knowledge that cannot be gathered at the surface; it must be brought up from below.

Apart from this single connecting thread, Gnosticism embraced a great diversity of doctrines. Some of the groups were not Christian sects at all but had affiliations with Judaism, with Middle Platonism, with the cult of Hermes Trismegistus, or with Zoroastrianism. Even within overtly Christian Gnosticism there was considerable variation. Professor Pagels does not attempt a rigorous definition of the term, but she cites a few organizing ideas toward which most Gnostics tended. Fundamental among them is the notion that "the kingdom of God is within you." That slogan, of course, is to be found in the canonical scriptures, but until recently the churches have not been comfortable with it. The Gnostics were also inclined to view Jesus not as a redeemer but as a spiritual guide, one who "speaks of illusion and enlightenment, not of sin and repentance." A third characteristic belief is that Jesus was not uniquely divine. However one chooses to construe "divine," it describes an attribute shared by at

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least some subset of humanity. In particular, anyone who attains enlightenment or *gnosis* becomes "no longer a Christian, but a Christ." In addition to these matters of belief, the Gnostics were distinguished by their mode of religious practice, which emphasized a severe asceticism. Celibacy was expected as a matter of course, and complete withdrawal from society was sometimes recommended.

For many years the doctrines of the Gnostics were known almost exclusively through tracts written in condemnation of them—the most important source being the works of Irenaeus, who was bishop of Lyons about A.D. 180. That is not the ideal way to reconstruct a system of thought, but of the Gnostic literature itself only a few fragments seemed to have survived. The disappearance of the Gnostic literature is not hard to explain. By the time of Irenaeus, Gnosticism had already been branded a heresy, and the Roman church worked diligently to suppress it. After the conversion of Constantine, the church militant had the power of the state behind it, and the suppression became highly efficient. In a literary religion, the most effective way to extinguish nonconforming ideas is by burning books.

In 1945 a great jugful of Gnostic documents was unearthed near Nag Hammadi, a town on the Nile about 300 miles upriver from Cairo. The story of the discovery involves an Arab farmer engaged in a blood feud, a black-market dealer in antiquities, a smuggler, a one-eyed bandit, and other colorful characters. The political, bureaucratic, and scholarly bickering over the right to publish the manuscripts was even worse than in the case of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were found two years later but were made available to the public much sooner.

The find consists of twelve codices of papyrus bound in leather and a few pages from a thirteenth codex. Included are fifty-two works or fragments of works, of which forty were previously unknown except through citations in Irenaeus and similar sources. All the manuscripts are in Coptic (a language derived from the demotic form of Egyptian but written in Greek letters) and were apparently translated or copied in the fourth century. The source documents were Greek, most of them having been dated to the second or third centuries. It is conjectured that these books made up the library of a monastic fraternity with Gnostic tendencies. They were presumably buried when the enforcers of orthodoxy appeared on the horizon.

The publication of the Nag Hammadi documents is at last nearing completion, with a facsimile edition and an eleven-volume series of transcriptions and translations. Three years ago a one-volume collection of English translations was issued. There have been at least two popularizing accounts, and the scholarly bibliography now amounts to some four thousand entries. Still, the content and import of the texts are not widely known, and the book by Elaine Pagels should dispel some of that obscurity. Pagels learned Coptic while a student at Harvard, in order to work on the Nag Hammadi find; she is now head of the department of religion at Barnard College.

Professor Pagels is no more a naive or a gullible reader than the Gnostics were, and what she offers here is not a mere exposition on the texts but an interpretation of them. She is concerned mainly with the relation between the Gnostic movement and the Christian orthodoxy. In that context, she presents a thesis on how the social and political positions of the two groups influenced the development of their ideas.

Mystery may well be an indispensable ingredient of all religions, but Christianity seems to have a real appetite for big ideas that are hard to swallow: the Incarnation, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the Trinity, transubstantiation. Indeed, it seems the Roman branch of the church has sometimes gone out of its way to find impossible things which the faithful are asked to believe before breakfast. Gnosticism was by no means more rational, but it is interesting to note that it differed from orthodox doctrine in just those matters that now seem hardest to fathom. Then, as now, the sticking points were the same.

The idea of the Resurrection has long been the very heart of the faith. Since the second century the church has insisted on a single reading of it: Jesus really died, and he rose again, in the flesh, on the third day; at the last judgment, but not before, so will everyone else. Metaphorical and allegorical inter-

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pretations have been adamantly excluded. The Gnostic view was quite different. Belief in a literal resurrection was the "faith of fools"; the Resurrection "was not a unique event in the past: instead, it symbolized how Christ's presence could be experienced in the present." The experience was to come through visions, which are not tricks of the mind but divinely inspired (or even divinely engineered) revelations. "The Treatise on Resurrection," one of the documents found at Nag Hammadi, explains: "Do not think the resurrection is an illusion. It is no illusion, but it is truth. Indeed, it is more fitting to say that the world is an illusion, rather than the resurrection. . . . It is the truth which stands firm. It is the revelation of what is, and the transformation of things, and a transition into newness. . . . Already you have the resurrection. . . . Why not consider yourself as risen and [already] brought to this?" This constitutes what they call in the trade a "realized eschatology." (Parts of the above passage are given by Professor Pagels in a different translation. I am quoting from *The Nag Hammadi Library*, edited by James M. Robinson; Harper & Row, 1977.)

I suspect that many Christians today find this "transition into newness" a more congenial interpretation of the gospels than the image of a bleeding man who casts off his shroud and walks. The church of the third and fourth centuries, however, opposed it vehemently. Why did the orthodox churchmen find it necessary to take such a hard line?

Professor Pagels suggests a possible explanation. The bishop of Rome ruled the church, then and now, as vicar of Christ, that is, as his vicarious representative. This authority was based on the delegation of power to Peter by the resurrected Jesus. "Feed my sheep," Jesus told him, and according to tradition Peter ministered to the flocks of Rome, then passed the mantle to the next bishop in line, thereby founding the apostolic succession. If the Resurrection was historical and of the flesh, then the bishops' franchise was irrevocable and immune to all counterclaims. If the Resurrection was no more than a vision, however, or even a metaphor, then ecclesiastical authority could have no secure foundation. Anyone can have a vision. Indeed, the danger to the hierarchy becomes

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plain in one of the later Gnostic texts, which offers a variant account of the last conversation between Peter and the risen Christ. Jesus describes the rise of the bishops, but he complains that they are "waterless canals" who "do not understand mystery."

Another point of contention between the Gnostics and the orthodoxy was the physical nature of Jesus and the meaning of the Crucifixion. The Roman church insisted on having it both ways: Christ was at once fully human and fully divine. His suffering on the cross was real and was necessary if the sacrifice was to redeem humanity from sin. For the Gnostics, on the other hand, what impeded human progress toward God was not sin but ignorance, and so what was demanded of Jesus was not expiatory sacrifice but wise teaching. As a result, his divinity was emphasized at some cost to his humanity, and a rather different account of the Passion emerges. In one Gnostic text the flesh is crucified but the "real" and presumably disembodied Jesus is seen laughing above the cross. The most intriguing version of the story turns the Crucifixion into a farce of mistaken identity. It was not Jesus who was executed but Simon the Cyrene, the enigmatic figure who, in the three synoptic gospels (but not in John), shoulders the cross on the way to Golgotha. Jesus stood by "laughing at their ignorance."

Professor Pagels sees in these disparate views the doctrinal reflection of a controversy over the church's attitude toward martyrdom. During the persecution of the Christians, the faithful were counseled to accept death without protest, as Jesus had. Irenaeus spoke of martyrs as those who "strive to follow in the footsteps of the Lord's passion." That imitation of Christ would not make sense if Christ did not suffer as people suffer, and did not even die. And the Gnostics do seem notably less eager to make the ultimate act of faith. One of the Nag Hammadi tracts dismisses martyrdom contemptuously, as the easy way out. If salvation were so simple, "the whole world would endure this thing [and] would be saved." The author notes that God does not demand human sacrifice.

One can well imagine that a certain bitterness might arise between those who confess their faith and are led off to the lion pit and those who weasel out of the obligation. Tertullian of Carthage, another apologist for the orthodoxy, leveled against the Gnostics an explicit charge of breaking ranks. In Professor Pagels's paraphrase, Tertullian "traces the rise of heresy directly to the outbreak of persecution. This, he says, impelled terrified believers to look for theological means to justify their cowardice."

Professor Pagels applies the same method of social and political analysis to other doctrines that distinguished the Gnostic sects. Thus a Gnostic tendency toward dualism in theology reflects not only affinity for Greek and Persian thought (which has been well documented), but also opposition to Roman thought. The Roman position she summarizes in the slogan "One God, one bishop"; the assorted deities and demiurges of the Gnostics comported with a more pluralistic organization of the church.

The place of women in the church reveals a similar connection between doctrine and practice. In the Roman church their place was at the rear. The Gnostics, on the other hand, apparently encouraged female participation in the sacraments and may have ordained at least a few women. In Catholic theology the only woman of any significance is Mary the Virgin, and her cult is quite recent. Professor Pagels points out that even today she is not God the Mother but merely the Mother of God; she began as little more than the divine birth canal. Gnostic theology and cosmogony were much richer in female figures. Sophia, a representation of wisdom, repeatedly chastises the egotistical male God of Israel. In the revelation poem "Thunder, Perfect Mind," the "revealer" is a woman, or perhaps an androgynous figure, who announces, "I am the whore and the holy one / I am the wife and the virgin." Another revelation has a female redeemer, called Protennoia or Barbelo, who is identified as "the First Thought of the Father." Among the New Testament Marys, the Gnostics are drawn most strongly to Mary Magdalene, who is made an intimate of Jesus, privy even to secrets that were kept from the disciples.

On the whole, the interpretive method Professor Pagels applies to these texts seems reasonable and appropriate. There can be no question that power struggles in the early

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church had an influence on the formulation of doctrine, and they may even have been the predominant influence. In exploring these relations, she is led to a number of illuminating observations. Still, they are only observations, and they cannot be made to stand on their own as explanations of church history.

For example, the notion that there may be some relation between monistic theology and the episcopacy is appealing, but any attempt to establish a causal connection leaves the argument vulnerable to counterexamples. No people were ever more staunchly monotheistic than the Hebrews, and yet Judaism did not develop an autocratic church. Doctrinal disputes within Judaism have not led to the burning of books, much less to the burning of people. Similarly, the association of the Gnostics' theories of the Crucifixion with their resistance to martyrdom seems rather tenuous. Gnosticism arose before the persecution of Christians began in earnest. What is more to the point, Gnosticism continued to attract adherents even after the Roman church had taken upon itself the role of persecutor, and the Gnostics were among the main targets.

Professor Pagels points out that when the canon of the New Testament was defined, at the end of the second century or the beginning of the third, many of the Gnostic works had already been written. She asks how it came about that one small body of texts received the blessing of the church and all others were outlawed as heresy. Christianity might have turned another way, perhaps toward Gnosticism, or else it might simply have continued to tolerate a greater diversity of thought. The answer Professor Pagels suggests follows from her entire analysis of sectarian relations; the freezing out of all doctrinal systems but one can best be accounted for by examining the needs and ambitions of the church fathers.

I cannot refute this conclusion—after all, it is only to be expected that the bishops would keep their own interests in mind when compiling their syllabus—but it may be possible to supplement it. Some of the Gnostic works may have been candidates for inclusion in the New Testament anthology; indeed they may have been rejected on doctrinal grounds, for propagating ideas considered dangerous to

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the church institutional. Doctrine aside, however, there are other reasons for excluding the Gnostic texts, reasons of form and texture and structure. Five of the tractates found at Nag Hammadi, for example, call themselves "gospels," but they are clearly works of another kind entirely from the four canonical gospels. Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John are first of all narratives; they tell the story of Christ. Their genre is biography, whatever else may be imposed upon them. Nowhere in the Nag Hammadi manuscripts is such an account of the life of Jesus to be found. If there is a formula for a typical Gnostic text, it is that of a dialogue between one of the apostles and the risen Christ; the events preceding the Resurrection are assumed to be known. Jesus appears, not as the engaging protagonist of a story but as a mere mouthpiece for ideas. Such doctrinaire stuff could not compete on an equal footing with the gospel narratives.

Professor Pagels has been reading this literature for a decade and knows these distinctions well. Her concluding remarks point to another connection between doctrine and the organization of the church, a more fundamental connection. She quotes Helmut Koester: "The test of orthodoxy is whether it is able to build a *church* rather than a club or a school or a sect, or merely a series of concerned religious individuals." That is a test Gnosticism could never have met; it was too intellectual, too exclusive, too severely ascetic, too little of this world. One imagines that the Gnostics themselves must have grown weary of so much intensity and introspection. At times their works read like the pamphlets of some self-actualization movement in southern California.

Thus Professor Pagels is led to formulate a principle that might be called "the origin of religion by means of natural selection." The orthodox doctrine overcame all its challengers, not because it offered better or truer doctrines but because it was associated with the stronger institution. Had Gnosticism prevailed in the second century, Christianity itself might not have survived. "For ideas alone do not make a religion powerful, although it cannot succeed without them; equally important are social and political structures that identify and unite people into a common affiliation."

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The Reader Replies

The Machine in the Library

Ruth Gay concedes (Winter 1979/80) that her mournful account of the impending replacement of library card catalogues by computers is not "the whole story." Notably omitted is consideration of the inadequacy of the card catalogue as a research tool and the superior ability of the computer to supply the information scholars need. Even if, as Mrs. Gay suggests, the change is being hurried along by a new breed of unlettered managerial technocrats with eyes only for a bottom line, the result for scholars is likely to be better than if libraries remained in the hands of more bookish types who share Mrs. Gay's sentimental attachment to the traditional, and traditionally deficient, catalogue.

A major reason is that card catalogues are so expensive to produce and maintain that economic considerations are apt to shape their content as decisively as intellectual goals or users' convenience. For example, separate listings of the authors, titles, and subjects of monographs in a series may be omitted on the ground of cost, even though readers might find the information useful. Similarly, several works bound together in a single volume are apt to be listed only collectively. It is a common practice to limit the number of subject cards that may be made for a book, irrespective of other considerations, and to exclude government documents and small pamphlets altogether. As it is much cheaper to add information to a computer's data base than to make and file cards, the computer multiplies the economically feasible options. That is not to say that more information is always better than less, or that one would necessarily want every conceivable fact about a book to be separately noted in the catalogue, but only that the computer makes it easier to base such judgments on intellectual, rather than economic, considerations.

The computer also offers a great deal of flexibility in use. Mrs. Gay points out that the addition of subject entries to the catalogue made it possible to connect a book to several subjects even though the volume could be placed physically in only one spot in the classification, so that "a biography of Einstein may also have cards under physics, mathematics, and perhaps even politics." The computerized catalogue can go this one better by permitting the reader to select not just single subjects, but combinations. A computer can pick out the Einstein biographies that deal with politics but not physics, or vice versa, or books on imperialism that stress economic factors, or only those works on slum housing that were published before 1910 and contain illustrations, and so on through a hypothetically infinite range of specifications. Our accustomed ways of thinking about books and their descriptions are strongly conditioned by the linear, hierarchical structure of the card catalogue, but the prodigious capacity and speed of computers can, and probably will, lead to recognition of many new possibilities.

The persistence in the card catalogue of outmoded intellectual categories and assumptions is described at length by Mrs. Gay, and other writers have shown that catalogue subject headings may lag so far behind the developing terminology of a discipline as to be nearly useless for research purposes. Using a computer, one could, if one wished, change Negroes to Afro-Americans, Sexual Perversion in Women to Lesbianism, Aged to Senior Citizens, etcetera, at a stroke, and the catalogue's vocabulary could be as current as the newspaper's. One could do that if one wished, but one would also wish to consider the effect of such changes on the accuracy and integrity of the catalogue and the probable value to readers of one approach or another. The point is that only the computer provides the luxury of choice. With a conventional catalogue, as Mrs. Gay amply shows, the decision is foreordained by the staggering cost of removing and refiling millions of cards.

It is true, as Mrs. Gay reports, that a computer will not find Bollingen when asked for Bolingen, but neither will a card catalogue. In libraries of the size she has in mind, boli and bolli are in different drawers, thousands of cards apart, and the misspelling reader is equally lost either way. But on the whole, the computer can do more than the card catalogue to protect against human error. Consider the filing rules. It stands to reason that filing a multimillion-card catalogue is not a simple

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matter of abc, and library filing is in fact governed by a voluminous and intricate set of rules. Readers who do not know, for example, that McCarthy comes before Maclean, United States–History–Pictorial Works before United States–History–Civil War, and Sex (Psychology) after Sex–Terminology but before Sex Discrimination will have trouble locating those entries in a card catalogue. (Readers who do know those things may have trouble also, because practice is not uniform among libraries.) The problem vanishes when a computer searches the file—if you can spell it, the computer will find it. In a similar vein, the computerized catalogue's ability to supply printed copy on demand can safeguard against copying errors and the omission of information that later turns out to be needed. Without disputing Mrs. Gay's assertion that the accordion-folded printouts are less pretty than wallpaper, I would guess that most readers will nonetheless prefer them to scribbled notes and writer's cramp.

At times Mrs. Gay's argument reads as though the machine is to replace not only the catalogue cards, but the books as well—five hundred years of the search for clarity and beauty in typefaces abandoned, the joys of browsing lost. She also presents a rather odd view of the research process, apparently assuming that only scientists value specific questions and precise information, while the humanist's approach is to rummage foggily in the drawers, awaiting serendipity. More realistically, good research in the humanities, no less than in any other field, depends on knowing what you want and knowing how to look for it, and the exceptions to this, while occasionally spectacular, are few. And there is really nothing new or esoteric about the use of computers in humanities research. The journal *Computers and the Humanities* has been published since 1966.

Nor are the procedures involved in manipulating a computerized catalogue likely to be as daunting as Mrs. Gay would have us believe. Millions of people have quietly learned to converse with computers to make bank deposits, pay bills, ride the Washington Metro, etcetera, and the library catalogue will be likewise taken in stride. Interestingly, Mrs. Gay may be right in her prediction that "reference departments will have to undertake the more complex searches," but that will be because scholars who assume without doubt or question their perfect understanding of the card catalogue will be unashamed, and even proud in some cases, to acknowledge bafflement before a set of buttons on a terminal. Yet professorial hubris aside, the catalogue of a research library is a complex repository of specialized information which few people other than librarians—and, often, few librarians other than cataloguers—really understand and know how to make the most of. My guess is that following an initial period of readjustment, requests to reference departments for assistance with computerized catalogue searches will more often bear on the structure and organizing principles of the catalogue, which will be just what they were when the cards were in the drawers, than on techniques of communicating with the computer. But no matter. An increase in candor on this subject, whatever its cause, can only be good.

A library that resembles an airline terminal ("with call numbers instead of flight numbers flashing across the screen") may be no thing of beauty, but it is not ipso facto worse than the Gothic cathedrals and Roman baths we have had all along. Mrs. Gay's exaggerated lament for the vanishing card catalogue sounds a lot like Miniver Cheevy in the library. I'll take the machine.

THELMA FREIDES
Head, Reader Services
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Purchase, New York

* * *

Although Ruth Gay's essay provides some useful information on the attempts by libraries to cope with the information explosion, it contains at least two observations which could exacerbate existing negative attitudes in the academic community.

First, while the University of Oregon experience reveals some weaknesses of microfiche catalogues, a sophisticated analysis of catalogue-use studies demonstrates that the real difficulties of catalogue use are not inherent in any given medium but are a result of people's unwillingness to search more than one file. Hence we can only expect a new generation of catalogues to be effective if they inherit records for the most important and heavily used items from the old. This will require money, patience, and the cooperation and goodwill of all involved.

Second, the card catalogue is utterly inflexible and is as absolute a knave as any computer file with regard to misspellings and the terminological peculiarities imposed by the Library of Congress subject headings. Additionally, it lacks the potential for key-word-in-title searching, Boolean logic, and other, more flexible search capabilities being developed in automated systems. The elusive serendipitous fact is better stalked in the stacks, or in automated browse-mode, than in the card catalogue.

There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your makeshift catalogues, and I would rather spend my time doing an efficient automated search and then reading, writing, thinking, and relaxing than muddling

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through those allegedly aesthetic catalogue drawers. Scholars who are willing to invest a small amount of time to learn how to use the new tools, rather than resist them, will be amply rewarded.

James R. Dwyer
Catalogue Department
The Library
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon

Ruth Gay replies: The letters by Mr. Dwyer and Miss Freides illustrate the optimistic view of librarians who have been working with computers and believe them to serve scholarly as well as administrative purposes. Mr. Dwyer probably makes the best point when he says that "the elusive serendipitous fact is better stalked in the stacks," and I agree—neither the catalogue nor the computer can match the real thing. But insofar as we must depend on description rather than the object itself, the question remains in my skeptical mind as to how really convenient, comfortable, and economical the computers are as finding aids. Miss Freides is quite right that research in the humanities, as in the sciences, is most effective when the questioner is precise. But there is more than one kind of research, and such an objection raises the counterquestion as to whether the researcher is now to be directed by what the computer can do rather than by what he needs. When the researcher is asking for a discrete piece of information, then he is well and expeditiously served by the computer. But when he is involved in a review of the literature, where the bibliographic search is part of the intellectual process of defining a problem, then the computer is slower, more cumbersome, and physically more irritating to use than a card or book catalogue. It will not do to dismiss such an inquiry as "foggy."

At this moment, we in the libraries are very much in the position of master chefs at a banquet. We have prepared the menu, laid out the viands, and the question is whether the guests will find the production to their liking. The year 1981/82 will be instructive, if difficult, for us all. Of course, the users will have to learn the mechanics of the new tool, but even more than that, they will be adapting their search techniques to both its limitations and its possibilities. And it will transform the process. With the present state of technology, I cannot believe that anyone will subject himself to long periods of trying to read information from the tube. My own prediction is that until and unless it improves so that the letters don't shake and shimmer, the researcher will be using the computer for discovering precise bits of information and will be turning more and more to print for literature searches. If bibliographies are available in his field, he will be lucky. If he needs to order a printout, he may find his research a more expensive item than it was in the past. One of the elements, incidentally, that neither Mr. Dwyer nor Miss Freides mentions is the cost of putting the computer through its paces and the cost of getting a printout from which to work. Who will pay for computer time, telephone lines, paper, and power?

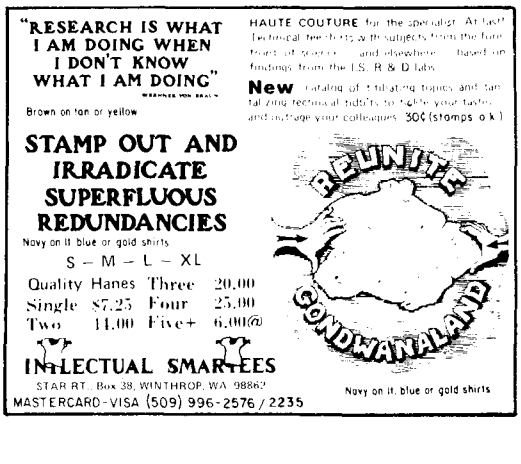
As the Chinese say, we are living in interesting times, but whether they will be fortunate or not, we have yet to see.

Disremembrance of Things Present

Aristides thinks *he's* got a bad memory (Spring 1980). Take a gander at *mine* (which is, alas, nine years younger). First, though, I want to point out a curious fact—more of an irony really: Why do people who have bad memories always remember when, where, and how they have forgotten?

I have forgotten:

my telephone number
my sister's name
how many years I have been married (the time I thought it was seven instead of six and felt morose for being unable to account for an entire year of my life)
how old I am (I count backwards by two from the sister whose name I forgot)
my telephone number again
which day to drive to the airport to retrieve a friend (the day after the one I went)
what grades my boys are in
the name of everyone I have to introduce right now
which drink is the bourbon and which the scotch
which street to get off at when I ride a bus (Once I climbed aboard a bus, dropped my money in the box and said, "Am I on the right bus?" The busdriver answered—



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rather curtly I might add—"Lady, how should *I* know?" It wasn't a total loss. At least he called me lady.)
my telephone number again

I can hardly believe this, but it's true that there are some people who can recite not only their home phone number, but also their license plate, social security, and—if they've been in the armed services—their dog tag numbers. I think this is a disgrace.

Maybe we could start a Bad Memory Club? It would be the ideal sort of club. Everyone would forget to pay dues, to attend meetings, to mail in their questionnaires as to what we should all talk about at the next meeting (what meeting?). How pleasant! A club that was free and that took no time.

C. Beard
Vermillion, South Dakota

* * *

In "Disremembrance of Things Present," Aristides mentions the prodigious memory of Seneca, who "was said to have been able to repeat two thousand names in the order in which they were given to him." The statement is true, although the "was said" should be changed to "as he, Seneca, said about himself." By general consensus when one names pure, unidentified Seneca, one thinks of Seneca, the philosopher. The Seneca with the feat of memory, however, was his less famous father, Seneca the Elder, also known as Seneca the rhetor. The paragraph occurs in his *Controversiae* I, Preface 2.

George Javor
Department of Foreign Languages
Northern Michigan University
Marquette, Michigan

A Man of Letters

This reader would like to contribute to Aristides' thoughts on receiving letters in the mail (Autumn 1979) an illuminating comment by Samuel Johnson. In December 1784, the last month of Johnson's life, Boswell writes: "As he opened a note which his servant brought to him, he said, 'An odd thought strikes me: we shall receive no letters in the grave.' "

Robert Halsband
Department of English
University of Illinois
Urbana, Illinois

CONFERENCE

The University of Nebraska at Omaha announces that a conference on the Art of the Printed Book will convene April 9–11, 1981, at the UNO Downtown Education Center. Topics of relevance might include book design and illustration, the history of hand printing, and the role of the small publisher considered from the perspectives of author, bookseller, and collector.

The conference coordinators wish to solicit participation from a wide variety of disciplines—authors, printers, binders, illustrators, literary critics, librarians, and others. The coordinators will accept proposals for papers, panel discussions, workshops, or presentations. Submit proposals to Mr. Mel Bohn, University Library, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska 68182. The deadline is October 15, 1980.

EMILY DICKINSON

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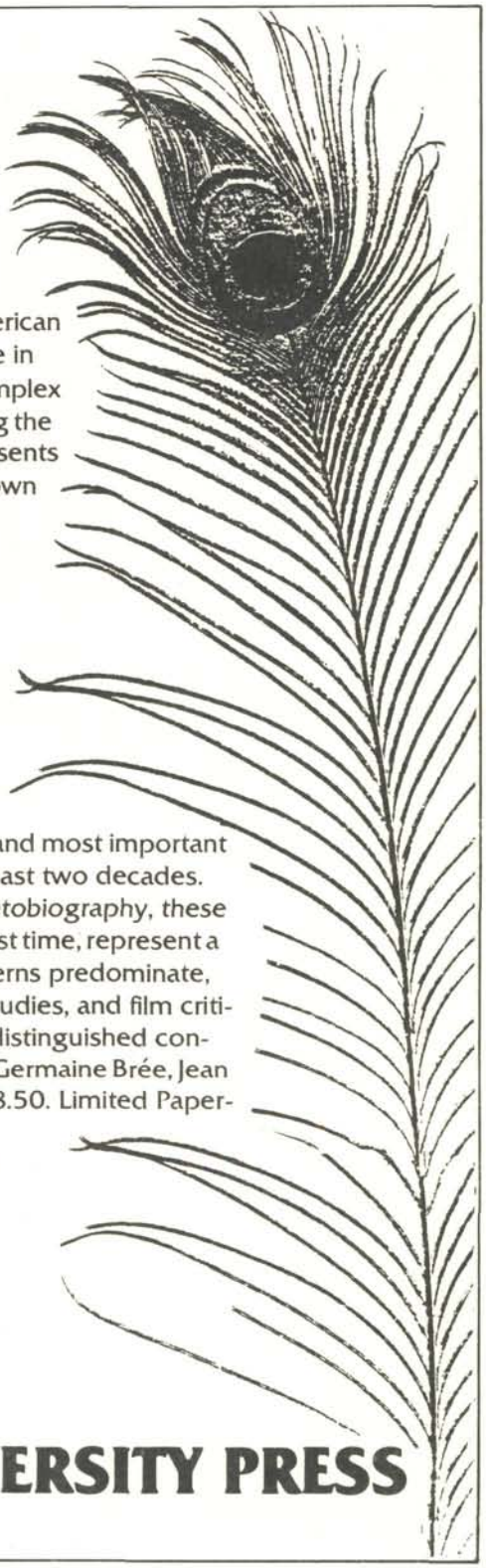

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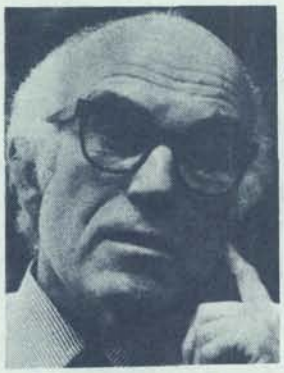

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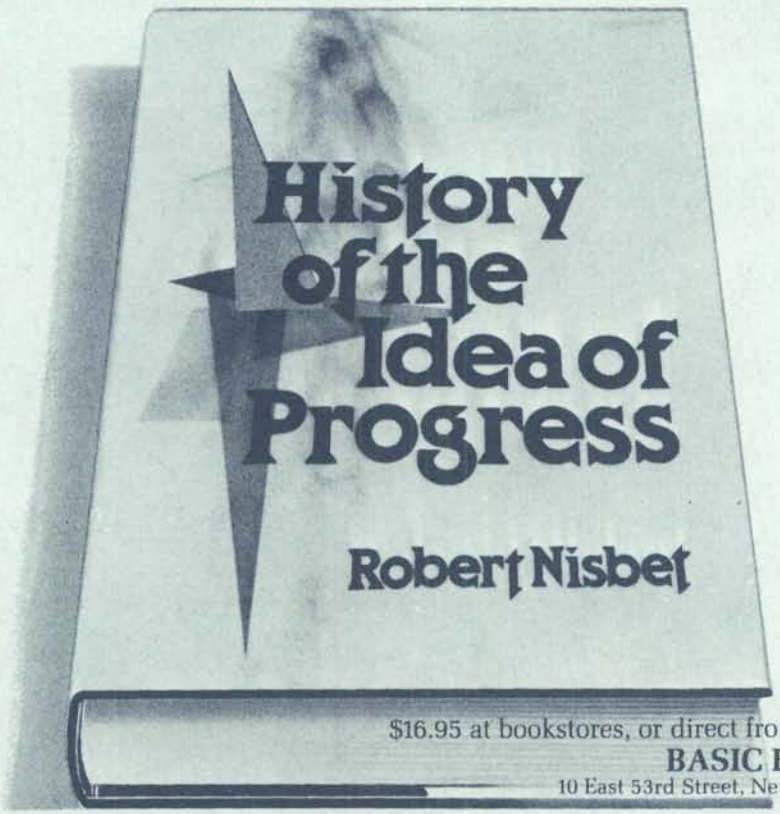

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